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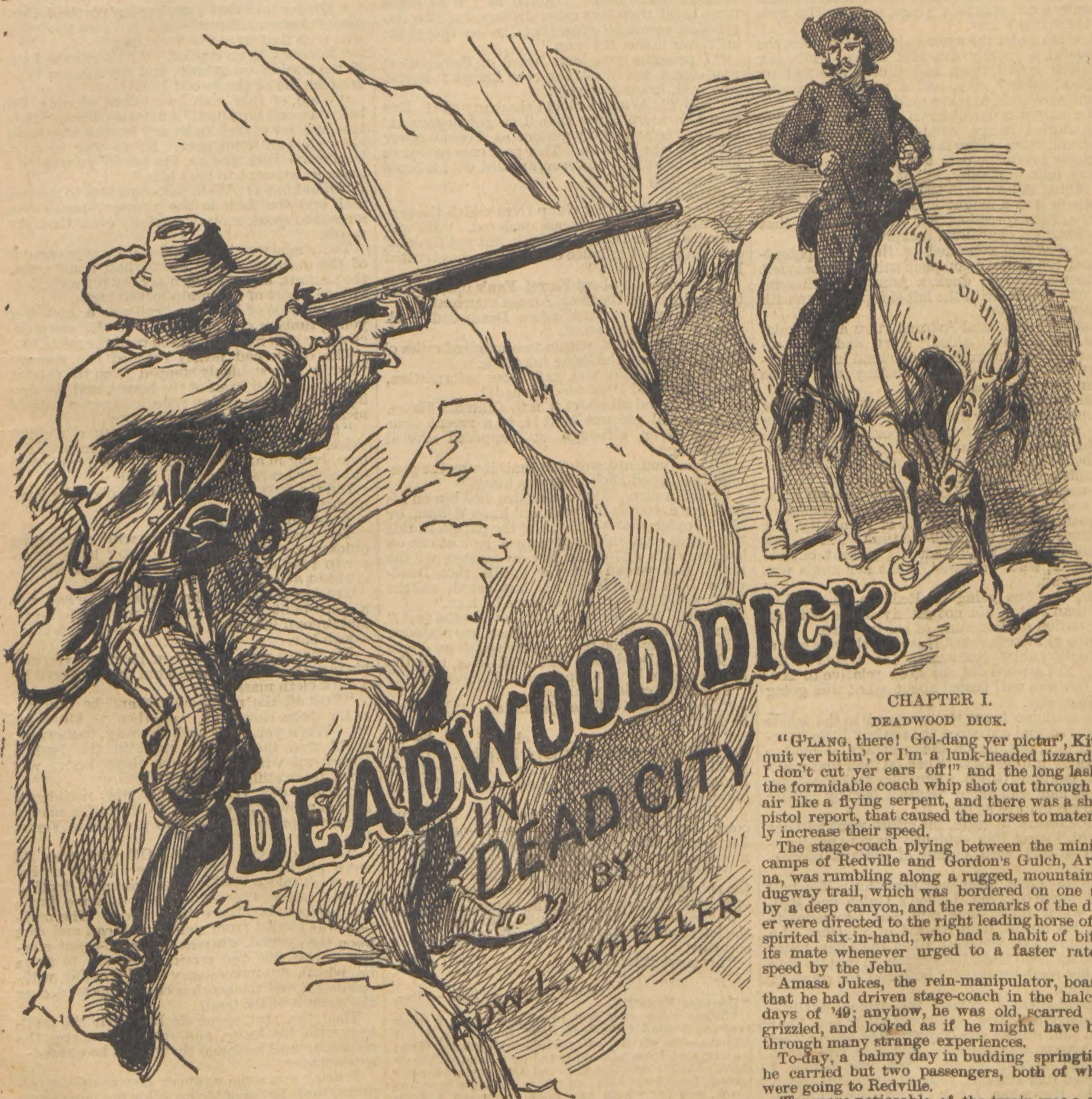
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CHAPTER I.

DEADWOOD DICK.

"G'LANG, there! Gol-dang yer pictur', Kitty, quit yer bitin', or I'm a lunk-headed lizzard, ef I don't cut yer ears off!" and the long lash of the formidable coach whip shot out through the air like a flying serpent, and there was a sharp pistol report, that caused the horses to materially increase their speed.

The stage-coach plying between the mining-camps of Redville and Gordon's Gulch, Arizona, was rumbling along a rugged, mountainous dugway trail, which was bordered on one side by a deep canyon, and the remarks of the driver were directed to the right leading horse of his spirited six-in-hand, who had a habit of biting its mate whenever urged to a faster rate of speed by the Jehu.

Amasa Jukes, the rein-manipulator, boasted that he had driven stage-coach in the halcyon days of '49; anyhow, he was old, scarred and grizzled, and looked as if he might have been through many strange experiences.

To-day, a balmy day in budding springtime, he carried but two passengers, both of whom were going to Redville.

The more noticeable of the twain was a man who occupied the inside of the coach, leaving but little room for any one else, for he was a

IN FACT IT WAS NONE OTHER THAN THE REDOUBTABLE DEADWOOD DICK WHO HAD BEEN BROUGHT TO A HALT.

monster in size, such a "corporation" as it had never before been Amasa Jukes's honor to haul, as he remarked to passenger Number Two. The man was of good average height, and so broad and ponderous of trunk and limb, that only with difficulty could he squeeze through the coach doorway.

He admitted that he weighed over three hundred, and dryly remarked something about not being full weight at that.

In face he was rather good looking, for he wore no beard. His eyes were small and brilliant, and his attire implied that he was well-to-do in finances as well as in flesh.

Jonathan Jester was his name, he had informed Amasa Jukes, and also stated that he was going to Redville on business.

The other passenger was perched on the driver's seat, alongside Amasa, partly owing to the fact that Mr. Jonathan Jester monopolized the greater part of the space within the coach, and partly to the fact that Number Two appeared to like the outside fresh spring air, and the beautiful landscape; but it was not a man who sat beside Amasa Jukes, although a person looking upon the stage-coach might have formed such an impression from the fact that the "outside" was dressed in male attire; but a girl between seventeen and eighteen years, it was, who rode on the driver's seat.

A trifle under the average height of women, she possessed a royally graceful figure, while her face was round, fresh and pretty, adorned by brilliant starry eyes, and a roguish, tempting mouth too sweet to leave unvisited.

Her hair was dark brown, luxuriant and fine, with fluffed bangs, wind-tossed over a waxen forehead, from where it rippled back, and flowed in glossy profusion over her shoulders.

Any man, certainly, might be held excusable for falling in love with the little beauty, at sight, for there was a magnetic something about her glance, her expression, her very presence, that was winning, charming, inexpressible.

Her costume consisted of the usual patent-leather top-boots, a complete suit of the heaviest immaculate white duck, a jaunty slouch sombrero to match, with the left side pinned up with a diamond-set star.

Contrary to inland Arizona rules and regulations, she wore a "b'iled" shirt, and stand-up collar, while a magnificent diamond in her shirt-front reflected a thousand dazzling rays, as the warm May sunshine kissed it.

Her hands, fair and white, boasted of no ring adornment; neither did she carry exposed weapons, as many another girl sport, such as she might be classed, was wont to do, as an advertisement that they were "on the shoot" should circumstances necessitate.

Amasa Jukes had driven stage many a year, and had encountered many an odd character of the many wild West varieties of humanity, but he found it hard to recall the time when he had "hailed a flyer gal," than his present outside passenger, who "allowed" that her name was Ferret Fan.

She, too, was going to Redville, but, unlike Jonathan Jester, did not satisfy Jukes with an explanation of the nature of her business.

Much to Jukes's relief, however, she was entertainingly gabby concerning the events of the day. Not a word did she drop relative to herself, but was well posted about what was going on, generally.

She made no inquiries in regard to the inside passenger, and appeared to take but little interest in him, but he, on the contrary, seemed so favorably impressed with her, on their first meeting at Gordon's Gulch, where they took the stage, that he had sought to "mash" her, by casting admiring glances at her.

Unnecessary to state, the effort went without reward, Ferret Fan evidently having no disposition to flirt with a man of Jester's proportions.

The stage had journeyed something like half the distance between Gordon's Gulch and Redville, when Jukes drew rein, and proceeded to water his horses, with the aid of a bucket, at a rill that crossed the trail, when the huge Jester thrust his head from the window to inquire as to whether road-agents ever bothered the stages of that trail.

"Road-agents?" echoed the driver, loftily—"road-agents? Now, gov'nor, I allow not. Thar was a time afore I tuk charge o' the hearse, thet road-agents war thicker 'long this trail then crawlers on old cheese. Thet war before I wrassled ther ribbons, ye must extinctly understand. But when I tuk charge, ther light-fingered imps vanished like dew afore a red-hot streak o' summer sunshine. Nary a road-agent unmolested ther trail arter et became known thet

Amasa Jukes war steerin' this enterprise—no, sir-ee!"

And the posture that Amasa struck was novel if not tragic.

"I must infer, then!" Jonathan Jester observed, "that you are something of a terror to road-agents?"

"A terror? Mighty Caesar, stranger, that ain't a Candlemas shadder tew what I be. When a road-agent hears thet I am within a hundred miles of his hang-out, he immegetly packs up his traps an' trade-marks and lights out fer pastures new. I'm counted wuss'n a man-o'-war, an' when ther breeze kerries my breath-scent ter the norstrils uv a road-agent, he says: 'Thar's no use 'round hyer fer me, an' ther best thing I can do is ter mosey!' Accordin'ly, sir, he gits!"

The man of flesh indulged in a slight laugh at Jehu's conceit, as he remarked:

"I am exceedingly pleased to know that there is no prospect of our meeting a band of road-agents," and then settled himself back out of sight, with a grunt of relief.

Amasa having finished watering his horses, the coach rolled on toward Redville.

"No, road-agents never bother me!" Amasa repeated, with a glance at the fair passenger on the seat beside him. "Dunno as I'm so much more orful than ther other drivers, but the impression seems to exist that I'm on ther shute an' never misses my man."

"I presume you have heard of the greatest road-agent the West has ever known?" Ferret Fan said, interrogatively.

"Hev I? Waal, I should chaw my cud! I've seen him more times than I've got fingers an' toes, an' he's the only gerloot as I could never git a straight bead on. Ther poor cuss passed in his checks at last, however, an' died w' his boots on, too, they say!"

"Dead?"

"Deader than ther camp from which the gerloot tuk his name!" Amasa declared. "He war a fly chap, war Deadwood Dick, but not fly enuff ter escape the Vigilance Committee who elevated him fer hoss-stealin'!"

An expression about Ferret Fan's lips, indicated doubt about the news Amasa vouchsafed.

"Were you present, when Deadwood Dick was lynched?" she asked.

"Nixy! I wasn't within two hundred miles o' the place where the thing tuk place."

"Then, how did you gain your information, that Deadwood Dick was lynched?"

"Oh! I read all about it in the Phoenix Times. Thar's a full account 'bout it, in a recent issue of the paper, although et happened several months ago."

"Then, you are satisfied that it was the genuine Deadwood Dick, who was hung?"

"Sart'in sure. The committee hed bin on his trail fer a couple o' weeks, an' know'd him, ov old. I opine thar's a couple o' the papers in this trip's mail bag, an' I'd give ye a look at one on 'em, only it's ag'in' the law to tamper w' the mail. But ye can bet yer boodle thet Deadwood Dick has played his last keerd, an' the trails won't be troubled no more by him."

"Would to Heaven that such were the fact!" Ferret Fan said, with manifest earnestness.

"But as a fact, the report don't weigh an ounce to the ton. Deadwood Dick still lives, and the man who died by lynching was an innocent man!"

Jukes looked incredulous.

"Ye don't say so!" he ejaculated. "Ye must be dreamin'!"

"Ah! no—far from it, or else I'd not be on the trail of vengeance!" the girl replied. "Deadwood Dick still lives—was a hundred miles from Phoenix when the wrong man was lynched, in his stead. Can you read?"

"Waal, I should chaw my cud! When ye come tew readin', I'm settin' on the summit ov Perfection Hill—but, spellin' an' grammer don't move in ther same society I do, nohow."

"Perhaps, then, you may be able to make out the substance of this!" and taking an unenvoloped letter from her pocket, Fan handed it to him.

Jukes passing the lines to his passenger, took the letter and gave it the benefit of a careful scrutiny.

This is what he read:

"NEAR PHOENIX, A. T., —, 18—.

"DEAREST FANNIE:—

"When your eyes rest upon this letter, if they ever do, I shall have been dead for weeks, if not months—the victim of mistaken identity. Since leaving you, I have been hunted by a band of blood-thirsty Vigilantes, who believed that I was the notorious Deadwood Dick, of whom we have heard so much, and for whom you once expressed a keen sense of admiration. Little I thought then, that he would be the cause of my death.

"I have used my utmost endeavors to avoid capture, anticipating what my fate would be if cap-

tured; but at last they have nabbed me, and I am apprised that I have but half an hour to live. They disbelieve all my protestations, and nothing I can say or do seems to change their opinion but what I am Deadwood Dick.

"I have been granted the respite to write this last letter, and have been assured that it will be sent to you.

"It is hard to die, Fannie, my darling, knowing how truly we have loved each other, but, as fate has ordained that it shall be so, I beg that you will not grieve over my death, but instead, avenge me. I pray—I command, that you will avenge me. I die in the stead of another man, and it is my last earthly prayer that you take the trail of vengeance, and never love another than me until you have laid low the man I die for.

"Good-by, my darling—good-by. We shall never meet again here below, but I trust we may be reunited in the hereafter.

"Your own

"FRED."

The missive was of a good style of chirography, and written in pencil.

Amasa Jukes read it over and over, and finally returned it to Ferret Fan, with a shrug of the shoulders.

"Well, what do you think of it?" Fan asked, eagerly. "Isn't that evidence enough that Deadwood Dick isn't dead?"

"Kinder luks that way, 'cordin' ter the dockyment," Amasa acknowledged. "S'pose the feller who writ that were yer lover, hey?"

"Possibly," Fan replied. "At any rate, I am on the trail of vengeance, and my mission is to take the life of Deadwood Dick!"

"Waal, ef ther cuss hain't dead already, I'll bet you won't hurt him!" Amasa declared. "He's too cute ter git tuk in by ary human who can't chaw steel an' drink gore. Ef ye war to meet Deadwood Dick to-day, I'm bettin' ye wouldn't make an attempt to hurt him."

"Wouldn't I? Well, just show him to me and see!" and the flash in the young woman's eyes seemed to speak more vengefully even than her words.

The stage was now toiling up a steep ascent of the dugway road. Ahead, half a mile, was the summit, beyond which lay the town of Redville in a sort of mountain-locked basin.

On one side of the stage-trail was a thicket of young timber; on the other was the steep declivity which had skirted the road for miles.

The coach had nearly reached the summit when a man suddenly stepped from the thicket into the road in front of the horses, and the sunlight of the spring day reflected upon a pair of nickel-plated revolvers in his grasp.

"Slow up there!" he ordered, in a ringing voice. "Make no attempt at resistance, or my men, lying in ambush, will make a pepper-box out o' yer hearse, horses an' hide!"

Did the ferocious Amasa Jukes obey the command?

To be sure he did!

The coach came to a halt with astonishing quickness, and, despite his boast of being a terror to road-agents, Amasa Jukes made not the slightest attempt to draw a weapon.

The individual who had ordered the halt was a wiry-built fellow of about medium stature, and dressed in a dark suit, top-boots, and black slouch hat.

His hands were incased in black gloves, and his face from forehead to chin, was covered by a dark cloth mask.

"Toss off the mail-pouch, thar!" he ordered, as the stage slowed up, "an' then ye kin drive on. When you come back this way, to-morrow, you'll find the bag all right in the bushes. Hurry up with it now, or them horses will carry three stiffies on ter Redville!"

"What der yer want w' the mail-bag?" Amasa growled, trembling in spite of a master effort to appear brave, in the presence of Ferret Fan.

"None of your business. Off with it, or I'll put a pill through your cabeza. Boys! ef thet bag don't take a tumble in two minnits, fire!"

This latter order, addressed to some invisible persons, had the desired effect. The mail-bag was hauled from under the seat, and cast upon the ground, whereat the road-agent stepped to one side and motioned Amasa to drive on, which, it is unnecessary to add, he did, without delay, and the coach soon disappeared over the summit of the trail.

Then the road-agent slashed open the mail-bag with his knife, and searched among the contents, until he found that which he wanted—a newspaper.

Tearing away the wrapper he scanned its columns, until he came to the following news item:

"DEATH OF DEADWOOD DICK—We learn, on good authority, as we are about going to press, that the notorious outlaw, Deadwood Dick, was lynched near French's Ford, last night, by a posse of Vigilantes,

headed by Howlin' Jake Budd, who had been chasing him for nearly a month. The country will breathe freer, now that the famous footpad has met the fate he so richly deserved."

A dry laugh burst from the highwayman, as he thrust the paper in his pocket, and gave the mail-bag a kick into the underbrush.

"So the country will breathe freer, eh?" he soliloquized. "Well, let 'er breathe, and I'll be enjoying the same great privilege, for Deadwood Dick is dead—oh! of course! If the *Phoenix Times* makes the assertion, it must certainly be so, no matter how Richard might feel on the subject himself. Ha! ha! ha!"

CHAPTER II.

A NOCTURNAL ADVENTURE.

Two days later saw the man who had stopped the Redville stage miles away from the trail, and riding through a deep mountain gulch in the midst of a terrific thunder-storm which had broken loose with relentless fury as the night closed in.

The darkness was dense, the wind blew a veritable hurricane, and the rain came down in torrents.

Deadwood Dick was mounted on a large, spirited bay horse, and was himself enveloped in an oilskin suit, that, in a measure, protected him from the fury of the storm.

He wore no mask now and his handsome face, with its graceful mustache and keen eyes, had lost nothing in the way of attractiveness since last we saw him.

Wild though the night, he urged his willing horse as fast as the rugged nature of the route would permit, and he appeared to have no immediate intention of seeking shelter from the storm.

The gulch ran between towering mountains in nearly a straight course to the northwestward, and was very narrow in places, huge outcroppings of rocks nearly meeting overhead.

Transverse gorges or ravines branched off the main gulch every little ways—dark, ominous passages, very suggestive of ambushed foes.

But Deadwood Dick seemed to entertain no idea of enemies lying in wait for him, for he urged on his thoroughbred steed with cheerful chirp.

The further he proceeded the more furious grew the storm, and it seemed as if the heavens were endeavoring to pour down their utmost contents.

Water rushed down the gulch, swift and fast, beneath his horse's feet, and the pyrotechnic display, up among the crags, was something fearfully grand.

At last the fury of the storm, as it eddied down through the gulch, became so great that Deadwood Dick drew rein.

"It ain't much use trying to make headway through this storm, Patsy," he said, addressing his horse. "I reckon we shall have to seek shelter in the next ravine, out of this wind. Looks as if it might rain for hours yet."

Pushing along a few rods further they came to a narrow transverse gorge where the wind did not play and the rain scarcely penetrated, owing to huge outcroppings and archings of rocks overhead.

Here Deadwood Dick dismounted, and to dispel the gloom, ere long kindled a roaring fire from dry fagots and timber found under the shelter.

He then threw himself upon the ground near the ruddy glow, leaving his horse to wander at will, knowing that it would not stray off, and would be quick to report any danger.

Feeling thus secure, and very much fatigued, Dick soon dropped off into a sound sleep—something unusual with him, for he generally, as the expression goes, slept with one eye open.

His repose was that of complete unconsciousness and he slept on, while overhead and around the elements warred furiously.

When he awoke, it was with a start, and to find that he was being carried along between a quartette of men.

He tried to twist himself from their grasp, only to discover that his limbs had been securely pinioned.

He tried to see, but his eyes were blindfolded. He was, in short, a prisoner, and being borne along to—where?

That was a question.

And there was no immediate way of deciding it—not at least until his captors should reach their destination.

On! on! they tramped, with regular measured tread, and Dick could not hear that they uttered a word as they went.

The thunder had ceased to alarm the night, and the rain had ceased falling.

Finally the captors came to a halt, and their prisoner was deposited upon the ground. Dick heard the men move around for several minutes, but without speaking, which somewhat puzzled him.

At length he was raised from his reclining position, and placed upon a chair; then the bandage taken from his eyes, but his limbs were left pinioned.

The scene that met his gaze, was to him a great surprise.

He had formed an idea that he was being carried to some outlaws' stronghold, where he was to meet some ignominious fate, but he gazed to discover that he was in a large, well-plastered, single-roomed cabin, where a fire roared in the big fireplace, and a lamp furnished additional illumination. There were a number of stools, a table, and two cot beds, in the way of furniture, while the walls were decorated with rifles, and the paraphernalia of a hunter.

Deadwood Dick was seated near a bed, on which lay a young and beautiful woman.

In a row, a short distance away, the four captors were each seated upon a stool. They were men of commanding stature, each attired in complete suits of black beaver-skin, with the fur side out, which, in connection with the fact that they wore full, jetty beards, and masks of a like color over their faces, gave them rather a savage appearance.

Hard at contrast was their appearance to that of the young woman upon the bed, and Deadwood Dick turned another inquiring glance upon her, after he had given the quartette a searching scrutiny.

His gaze was met by the earnest, appealing one of the young woman, who, although apparently not yet out of her teens, and outlined in Nature's happiest mold, was evidently suffering pain, judging by the pallor that suffused her cheeks.

"Sir!" she said, in a voice sweet and low, as Deadwood Dick turned to her, "no doubt you are surprised to find yourself in such strange surroundings?"

"In truth it is a surprise to me," Dick replied. "I must have been in a very sound sleep, not to have heard the approach of my capturers."

"Probably you were. I was told that you were asleep, in the gorge, and sent my friends, the Dumb Deveres, to bring you her."

"The Dumb Deveres?" Dick echoed. "Can these men not speak?"

"No. They are brothers of one birth, and have never uttered a word, more than an unintelligible grunt, or growl."

"And you?"

"Am nothing more to them than a stranger, whom they found dying in the mountains, and took in, that I might not perish in the storm."

"What is the matter of you? Are you hurt—wounded?"

"Yes. I am shot through the left lung, and am gradually filling up inside, although the wound has not bled, externally. I marvel that I have survived as long as I have. But, when I learned that some one was near, whom I could talk with, it strengthened me up, wonderfully. The Deveres cannot write, you know, and it is difficult for one to understand their finger language. However, you have come, and I am glad for I have much to say to you. What is your name?"

"Deadwood Dick—or, at least, that's about the only name that I ever get."

"I have heard of you, sir. You have a singular reputation—both good and bad. I don't know whether I can trust you or not."

"Suit yourself about that. I never go back on my word, if it is possible to avoid it, nor am I particularly anxious to burden myself with any one else's secrets, or sorrows; but, when duty and honor are involved I stand ready to make any sacrifice."

"Oh! I will trust you. I must trust somebody, for I cannot die without leaving behind my statement. Are you ready to listen?"

"I am. Go ahead."

She lay silent, a few minutes, with her gaze riveted upon the ceiling, as if collecting the words she had to utter; then, she spoke:

"I hardly know how to begin that which I have to tell," she said, "excepting by going back several years. I am one of two sisters, who were born of rich and respectable parents, who resided near Sacramento, California. Our parents were farmers, but were so wealthy that we, their children, lacked for nothing, and were, to some extent spoiled. We had the best advantages of education, dress and society, at a very early age, and, when I was but sixteen, I eloped with my lover, and we were married."

"At first my parents were much incensed, for

my husband was not well-to-do; but finally, they took us home, and set my husband a-going in the world. My father was the president and principal stockholder of a local bank and Rex Ravel (that was my husband's name) soon in gratiated himself into papa's esteem to such an extent that he was made cashier. Our family name was Harrison—mine is Lelia.

"Thus matters ran along for over two years. In the mean time a child was born to us, and we were very happy—at least I was, and I had no reason to believe otherwise than that Rex was the same. Then all changed—suddenly. The shocking truth came out that Rex had absconded, with seven thousand dollars of my father's money, and that my younger sister, Flora, had gone with him. You may imagine how the terrible news affected me, and how it disgraced my family. Flora, a year my senior, had been the pet of the family, and was, at the time, engaged to an estimable young man named Harold Haines, and none of us for an instant ever suspected that she had any intrigue with my husband.

"Well, to make a long story short, for I feel that I am growing weak, the shock killed my mother, who was in ill-health, and my father only survived her three weeks. As for myself, I came very near to death's door, but gradually recovered.

"When my father's will came to be opened and read, it was found that he had left the bulk of his fortune, which was in money, to my child, little Rex, or, as the will read, to 'Rexford S. Ravel.' Of course, the fortune was meant for my child, but as there was no mention made of any guardian, the lawyers claimed that the intent of the will gave the money to my runaway husband, Rexford S. Ravel. Only the trifling sum of five thousand dollars, together with the homestead, was left me.

"Well, as soon as the contents of the will became known, a lawyer appeared upon the scene to look after the matter in my runaway husband's behalf. He spent money freely, to influence opinion, and succeeded so well that nearly every lawyer agreed that the money belonged legally to my husband instead of my son. The lawyer Sandford Shields, who had drawn up the will, stated that he had been given no cause to conclude for which Rexford S. Ravel the bequest was meant, as my father had made no distinction.

"Before my father's fatal illness he had placed the amount of his bequest to Rexford S. Ravel in the hands of a personal friend, by him to be held in trust until demanded by the heir. This man believed my son to be the intended heir, and so declined to deliver the inheritance until a final decision was made by the court.

"He, however, came to me and said if I would marry him the money should never go to any one but my son. He held possession of it, was worth nothing in particular himself, and possession was nine points of the law. Of course I refused him. He was a man I could never have fancied, were I free to marry, which, of course, I was not. So he departed, saying he should then feel constrained to act according to the decision of the court.

"A few days later I received a telegram from Phoenix, Arizona, that Flora was there, deserted, and dying from wounds inflicted by my husband, and requesting that I should hasten to her bedside. At first I hesitated, but at length, influenced by a spirit of forgiveness, I took my departure, accompanied by little Rex. At last, after a long and tiresome journey, I reached Phoenix, and learned that no such person had been at the place my sister had named. I had been led away on a wild-geese chase—a false trail!

"Failing to learn anything of either Flora or my husband, I set out on my return to my home in California. When I arrived there, I was apprised that the court had rendered a decision in favor of Rexford Ravel, senior, and the decree ordered the custodian of the fortune to deliver it to the rightful heir.

"Accordingly, he, in company with Spriggins, my husband's lawyer, had set out to deliver the money to my husband, who was said to be living in Arizona. At first I was unable to learn where, but finally, by dint of a little detective work, I found that their destination was a played-out mining-camp called by miners Dead City, otherwise Doonville.

"Thoroughly fired with indignation, I engaged the services of a detective, and, armed with proper papers, we set out on my mission of vengeance, little Rex, my bright little three-year-old boy accompanying us.

"To-day, shortly after noontide, we were attacked by ambushed enemies, in a pass not many

miles from here, and Mr. Amler, my detective, was shot dead, while I was mortally wounded. I remember falling from my horse, and that my poor child was snatched from my arms by a brutal-looking wretch; then I lost consciousness. When I recovered I was here, where you see me. I have learned that one of the brothers found me, and brought me here, but found nothing of Detective Amler, or my poor child!"

Here she ceased speaking, tears filling her eyes.

Deadwood Dick had listened attentively to her recital, and evidenced considerable interest.

"This is indeed a sad case!" he said, gently. "Were you robbed when you were attacked, Mrs. Ravel?"

"No! no! That was not the object. My money and jewels were not molested. The attack was made to get rid of me, and obtain possession of my boy!"

"Then you presume that it was made at the instigation of your husband?"

"Without a doubt. No one else would want my poor child. It was my faithless husband, no doubt, who lured me to Phoenix, in hopes of getting a chance of possessing himself of my boy, but I was then too vigilant for him. And now, sir, you have heard my story—nearly the last words of a bitterly-wronged and dying woman. You are a stranger to me personally, but I cannot believe you would add an injury to that I have already received. Therefore, can I beg and pray of you to do me a favor?"

"If there is anything I can do for you, dear lady, you may command me. My time is my own, and I seldom, if ever, refuse to assist a person who is in distress."

"Oh, thank you! thank you, sir. But let me tell you what I want of you. Do you know where Dead City is, sir?"

"A report of the place having reached me, and being of a curious turn of mind, I am now journeying thither to see what the place looks like."

"So much the better. What I want you to promise me, is this: That you will get possession of my boy, and either bring him up yourself, or else give him into the keeping of some kind family who will rear him as their own son; also, that you will obtain possession of the fortune rightfully belonging to my child, and divide it equally between yourself and him, taking care to put his share away so his father can't get at it. Promise me that you will do this, sir, and I will invoke God's blessing upon your head!"

"I make no hesitation in promising that which you have requested, dear lady. Your story has deeply interested me, and it will be a pleasure for me to do you the service. The boy shall be taken from his unnatural father, and well-cared for. I will also secure the money, and place it to his benefit, if possible. What was the amount of the bequest?"

"Forty thousand dollars, sir."

"Indeed? That is a large sum. Was it not rather odd that your father should place so large a sum in one man's hands?"

"Yes, it was. But then, he trusted Mr. Jester, implicitly."

"Jester, eh?"

"Yes, sir."

"And the name of your husband's lawyer?"

"Silas Spriggins!"

"And your sister's lover?"

"Harold Haines!"

"And the man who drew up your father's will?"

"Sandford Shields."

"Is he still in Sacramento?"

"I do not know."

They chatted on for a few minutes longer, when the Dumb Deveres arose, and stood as if in waiting.

"They mean that they are ready to take you back whence they brought you!" Mrs. Ravel said.

"They are strange men, who, for cause, have thus isolated themselves, and wish to keep the exact locality of their home, a secret. So I shall have to say good-by, and may God speed and bless you."

She seized his bound hands, and covered them with grateful kisses, and after they had exchanged a few more words of parting. Dick suffered himself to be blindfolded, by the strange brothers, and was by them raised, and born from the cabin.

No halt was made for over an hour, and when Deadwood Dick was finally stood upon his feet, he felt that the thongs about his wrists were loose enough for him to free his hands.

By the time he had freed them, and tore the bandage away from before his eyes, the Dumb Deveres had vanished as surely from view, as if the earth had opened up and swallowed them.

And he was back where he had been abducted from, as was evidenced by the smoldering embers of his fire, near at hand, and his horse, which was lying close by.

Thus, he was at the end of a singular nocturnal adventure, which seemed more like a dream to him, than reality.

And before him, was a mission, as strange as his visit to the hidden cabin—a mission, no doubt, full of rich promise of—adventure and peril.

But what of that?

Life had no charm to Deadwood Dick, if unattended by those two conditions.

CHAPTER III.

BUG-JUICE BOB'S VISITOR.

"SAY, thar, stranger, jest hold yer Arabian charger, or I'll put an ounce of plumbago through yer cabeza, quicker than lightnin' ever slid down a iceberg, begum!"

The speaker sat astride a huge boulder, one of many that filled a rugged gulch bottom, and held a rifle leveled at a horseman who had just ridden around an abrupt bend, close to where the challenger was seated.

The horseman drew rein, as promptly as if he were in the habit of being stopped in this decisive manner, and the two men surveyed each other, with mutual curiosity.

The challenger was a man of over forty years, with lank but muscular figure, that betrayed in every lineament that he was no stranger to roughing it in the mountains. His face was scrawny, reddened, and bore the scars of many scrimmages. His eyes were keen, however; he wore a straggling apology of a sandy beard.

He was roughly and slouchily attired, and, at the best, a dangerous-looking individual to meet, in a lonely place in the mountains, especially, as besides being armed with the rifle, his belt fairly bristled with weapons.

Man number two, who was mounted upon a fine-looking horse, with perfect accouterments, was seemingly about thirty years of age, wirily built, and handsome of figure, despite the fact that his habiliments were somber black.

A clear cut, recklessly handsome face was his, with a firm but pleasant mouth, shaded by a graceful mustache, dark, flashing eyes, in whose glance there was intense magnetism; long wavy hair that fell gracefully back over his shoulders—in fact it was none other than the redoubtable Deadwood Dick, who had been brought to a halt.

The two men surveyed each other, critically, for a couple of minutes, ere either one ventured to speak.

"Well, sir, what you want?" the somber sport at length demanded, his manner not betraying any trace of alarm.

"What do I want?" echoed the man with the gun. "Waal, me buddin' poppy, I want yer ter stop, dismount, tell me who ye aire, where ye'r goin' an' so forth—in fac', give a clear verbatim account o' yerself, as ye orter do, since I axed ye ter slow up fer ther special purpose o' offerin' ye a drink o' ther prime old Monongyheeler that ever tickled ther thorax uv mortal man. My handle aire Bug-juice Bob, an' now, w'ot's yourn?"

The rifle-muzzle dropped to earth, and the scaly looking straggler drew a quart bottle of whisky from one of his capacious pockets.

"My name might be Peter Pepperpot, but it ain't!" Dick replied, dryly, not fancying the looks of his accoster. "If you find yourself under any obligations to call me anything, Nightshade Nick will do as well as any."

"Kerect! That ain't a bad handle. Et corresponds wi' yer appearance. Goin' ter Dead City, I allow?"

"I am journeying that way. Why?"

"Oh! nothin'!" And here Bug-juice Bob uncorked the bottle and took a swig.

"Reckoned ye war goin' thar, fer ther ain't nary other place ter go, up in this d'rection. Hev a soak? Et's ther prime stuff—an' thar's no better judge o' ther animal in ther country than yours truly!"

"No, thank you. I don't use the stuff except on necessary occasions. How far is Dead City from here?"

"Dunno, exactly. Tho't mebbe when I stopped yer thet ye could give me some p'int."

"Then, are you traveling that way?"

"I should smile. 'Cordin' ter my chronologercal conclusions, ther camp can't be far ahead. Most likely I shed be thar now, only I stopped hyer ter drink a pint o' old monongerheeler, an' when I hed finished suthin' happened."

"You don't mean to tell me you drank a pint of liquor recently?" Dick asked, noticing no effects of intoxication about him.

"Humph! of course! Thet's nothin'. My regular rations aire a pint every consecutive twelfths part o' a day, or I'd fall by ther wayside, a victim o' Sahara-like thirst. Mebbe ye don't know et, Mr. Nightshade, but I've got ther gold medal fer being able ter drink more bug-juice per diem, an' never-be-fazed, than ary other gerloot west o' the Mississipp. Ter prove it, ef you an' I journey on ter Dead City tergether, I'll punish this quart afore we git thar."

"I do not care to witness the disgusting exhibition!" Dick said, dryly.

"Oh! 'tain't nothin'. I hed me orthodox b'iler shot away by red-skins years ago, an' hed a non-corrosive copper one put in its place, ye see. What yer goin' ter Dead City fer?"

"Out of curiosity. I heard of the place being without an inhabitant, and concluded to take it in, for the novelty o' the thing."

"Jest my case, exactly. I allow we're pards, then, in the wisit?"

"That is for you to say. I am going on to-day. Do you know anything about the place—about its history, I mean?"

"Not much. I've hearn tell thet er colony o' prospectors located there, headed by a Spiritualist, who allowed the place war a regular mint o' gold fer ther workin'. They built a town, but didn't git no gold, an' hung Mr. Spiritualist ter a limb. No sooner hed they done this than small-pox set in, an' ther' was a time, you bet? Some got over et, an' mosied, while them thet kerflumixed aire thar yet. I've hearn trappers tell as how they wouldn't spend a night thar fer a mount'in o' gold—sed as how et war a regular cemetery o' stiffs, wi' ghostes throw'd in."

"Rather a lugubrious place, I should say, from that outline," Dick observed. "How does it happen you propose going there? You are not superstitious, I infer?"

"Nary a bit, me bloomin' Nightshade. Ther only speerits as effects me air them from monongerheeler, when the serpents begin ter hiss in me boots, an' thet ain't often. It's many a day, neow, sence I've cut off the head o' a snake, an' as fer ghosts, an' sich like, do me countenance luk like thet of a man who is afeard ov small things ethereal? Yer don't know Bug juice Bob yet, Mr. Nightshadder Nicholas!"

"It would seem not!" Dick admitted, as the peculiar man took another long pull at his bottle. "By the way, did I not hear you remark something about something happening—that you would be in Dead City now if something had not happened?"

"Kerect! You did. S'pose ye'd like ter know what I meant?"

"Yes."

"Waal, I'll tell ye. I hed jest poised myself on this rock an' taken one small-sized corral, when I heard a voice say, interrogatively, 'Hillo, stranger, thar!' I looked around an' responded. 'What yer want?' without seein' a soul. 'Aire ye goin' ter Dead City?' war the next salute I got, an' I replied thet I were. Then out o' them bushes over yonder cum ther purtiest gal I ever see'd—a regular stunner, she war, rigged out in Sunday-go-gallop togs—an' she p'inted her finger at me, an' sez she, in desprit tones w'ot made me shiver: 'Go to Dead City at your peril!' She put on the hydraulic pressure on your peril, too. 'All who go there die, and never return.' Then, pard, thet aire gal she jest floated back inter the bushes, like a cloud o' smoke from a clay pipe wi' the stem broke off, an' dissipated from view, an' I war cogitatin' over the occurrence when I heerd ye cummin', and made up my mind ter fetch ye inter the scrape fer company."

Deadwood Dick's discerning eye had never once left the face of Bug-juice Bob; he had been studying the man, as a preceptor of human nature would do, and his conclusion was that the fellow had not been lying by the wholesale.

"Pooh!" he said, however. "There must have been a large opportunity to cut the head off a snake a few minutes ago."

"Not by a jugfull!" Bob declared, seriously. "Thar's nary a ram butted me this many a day, Nightshade, an' what I'm tellin' you aire solid, Plymouth Rock scripture. There's a myst'ry about this bizness, an' ef ther wind don't blow north when it's blowin' south, in you I hev struck the pard as air not afeard ter try ter solve it. I'm Bug-juice Bob, an' hev a capacity fer two bar'l, fire-test, copper-distilled—but I'm a liar ef I'm lyin' ter yer. A beautiful gal did jest what I hev told ye, an' that's sure's there's hair on a cat's back. Ef ye say so, we'll investigate!"

"Very well!" Dick said, sliding from the saddle. "If your statement is correct we can no doubt find tracks."

Together they approached the bushes, and closely scanned the ground.

Proof was plenty that Bug-juice Bob had not been deluded, for small footprints were found, and, further on, the hoof-marks of a horse.

"We will go on to Dead City and investigate!" Deadwood Dick said. "We will find out what's in the warning!"

CHAPTER IV. IN DEAD CITY.

THE announcement of Deadwood Dick proved that he was satisfied the scaly looking Mr. Bug-juice Bob—had met with the adventure he claimed; so, after a short consultation, Dick remounted his horse and they moved on.

The tramp had no horse, but that did not bother him in the least. His long legs strode beside Deadwood Dick's horse with perfect ease.

Nothing was spoken between them for some time when, just as the sun was tinting the mountain-tops in gold, Deadwood Dick drew rein at a point where the gorge, rapidly narrowing for a mile back, suddenly opened into a vista that was pleasing—ay, charming to the eye, at the first glance.

First glances rarely form correct impressions.

The second glances does more toward that.

What Deadwood Dick saw, and what Bug-juice Bob saw, standing beside the dark-clad sport, was a scene that perhaps no other Western country could equal, except Arizona, with its wealth of historical data and pre-historic remains.

In a mountain-locked valley—or, in more proper Western phrase in a "pocket," with mayhap half a thousand level acres, imprisoned by gigantic—ay! stupendous—walls of craggy mountains, reaching far up toward the sky, lay their destination—the much-talked-of Dead City.

From where Dick and his companion had halted was a descent, hence they overlooked the alleged played-out mining-town.

Half a hundred or more half-cabin, half-shanty, habitations were dotted in the heart of the pocket, which had the rather peculiar novelty of a double street—that is, a rapid torrent stream divided the town very nearly in half, and a street bordered either bank, the further side of each street being lined with the representative business establishments of the "City."

So much Dick and partner saw—and more; they beheld a lovely acreage spread out before them, in spots luxuriant with grass, in others with May's prettiest flowers.

No signs of mining; no signs of prospecting; no signs of grazing or agricultural pursuit; no signs of business, or humanity, about the place—within the silent "City."

"That must be our place!" said Dick interrogatively, his eagle eye never leaving Bob's face.

"That's the cheese, skippers throw'd in!" was the reply. "There ain't another human dot within sixty—mebbe a hundred miles from here, an' I reckon the description to a capital dot—semi-colon! That's the roost, whar you git the small-pox, ghosts, an' horrors all done up in a box—an' you can sell the box for what you want to take for it—should some one wander along!"

"I suppose me might as well take advantage of daylight, and explore the camp. If corpses and the like are lying around loose, as you have suggested, it will be infinitely more pleasant to view them by daylight, than by night," suggested Dick.

"Yas, I reckon ye'r right!" Bug-juice Bob assented, after taking another swig from his flask. "But, who knows but what we may git salivated ef we go nosin' around too permiscuss? Ef thar war anything in the girl's warnin', I'll swar et luks like ther might be a hornets' nest or two down there."

Deadwood Dick again swept his gaze searchingly over the apparently deserted town, but could see nothing to indicate that the place was inhabited by either man or beast.

"I don't anticipate any trouble!" he said, "so come along. If it comes to fighting I've done a turn at that, in my time!"

"Heer tew, you bet! I'm with yer, Nightshade, ef et comes ter spillin' gore. So lead ahead!"

Deadwood Dick obeyed, and the tramp brought up the rear, whistling unconcernedly—which Dick particularly noticed.

Somehow, he was not quite satisfied but what the fellow had been in the camp before, and knew more about Dead City than he was willing to admit.

In a few minutes they reached the pocket bottom, and the beginning of the street that bordered the left bank of the noisy, swift, deep creek.

As they reached the first cabin habitation, with its battlement front, they were confronted

by a bulletin board, on which was pasted a large sheet of cloth, containing the following notice in rude lettering.

"BEWARE!"

"This 'ere's Dead City, an' no one lives here. Ther small-pox cleaned out ther citizens, an' ther place ain't no good, nohow. No gold—no nothin'! So let ther stiff bevet. Disturb 'em not, at yer peril. Ther camp is thein, an' ye'r warned ter take a back trail quicker'n lightnin', or ye'll git the small-pox. Ther very air is full uv it. So mosey, while ye hev a chance, or ye'r a dead chicken."

"Signed

BILL GROWLER,

"Ther last citizen who puckacheed!"

Deadwood Dick and Bug-juice Bob read the notice, the former breaking out with a laugh!

"That's pretty good!" he said. "I wonder ef the poor fool who put it there thought it would scare anybody? If so, he must have been green. Go in that first cabin, Bug-juice, an' see what's there."

Bob eyed the place, hesitatingly, and took a fresh nip from his bottle.

"Why don't you go?" he demanded.

"Because I'm mounted. Ef you're afraid, however, I'll dismount, and go in myself!"

"Humph! me afraid? Weal, I guess not—no, sir-ee, bob-tail hoss!" and advancing he pushed open the cabin door, which was partly ajar.

"Two skeletons layin' on the floor!" he reported a moment later. "Wolves skinned 'em clean's a whistle."

"Try the next place!" Dick ordered, briefly. "Likely the result will be the same. While you are at it, look into every cabin on this side of the creek, and I'll cross over, and do the same on the other side."

There was a bridge over the creek, near the heart of the camp. Crossing it, Dick dismounted, before a large cabin, with a rude veranda in front of it.

A creaking sign announced that it was the Big Nugget Hotel.

On either side of it were store-front cabins and saloons.

Securing his horse, who sniffed the air and looked uneasily about him, as if afraid of something, Dick mounted the steps of the hotel, and tried the door. It opened readily enough, and he entered what appeared to have been a combined office, bar and gambling-room.

Tables and chairs were scattered around, and behind the bar, on shelves, were bottles containing liquors, and glasses, cigars, and so forth.

Dick paused and took a good look about the large apartment, before he ventured far into it.

He was far from satisfied that Dead City was uninhabited, and presumed if there were any inhabitants, they would repulse his arrival.

The moment he entered the Big Nugget his keen eyes made one discovery.

At one of the tables were seated four dead men, who appeared to have died right where they were sitting, for their arms rested supportingly on the table, and each man held a hand of playing-cards.

They were roughly-dressed, bearded men—miners, probably.

Decomposition had never set in after death; their skin and flesh had dried like parchment to their bones!

This was not all Deadwood Dick saw.

He had heard of Dead City, full six months ago; therefore, if the town had been deserted that long, dust and cobwebs would naturally collect over everything.

Such was not the case within the Big Nugget bar-room.

The floor had been cleanly swept, recently; there were no cobwebs; nor was there any dust upon the card-tables or bar.

If the place was only an abode of the departed, they, the departed, must surely employ a ghostly housekeeper to keep things in such order.

Such thoughts and observations were engrossing Deadwood Dick's attention when he was startled to feel a heavy hand grasp him by the shoulder!

CHAPTER V.

A PRISONER.

DEADWOOD DICK wheeled quickly, and found himself confronted not by one man, as he had expected, but by a half a dozen, all of whom held cocked six-shooters, in their grasp.

They were big, burly fellows, and typical specimens of border ruffianism, both in feature, attire and armament. Each wore full or straggling beards; their faces were scarred and each man had lost his left eye!

All in all, they were a desperate looking gang, and capable of any brutality or ruffian's work.

This much Deadwood Dick saw, at a glance.

The man who had clapped him on the shoulder, was a trifle taller and heavier than the rest, and appeared to be chief in command.

"Well! What do you want?" Dick demanded, with that coolness of demeanor characteristic of the man.

"We want you!" was the grim answer of the stalwart leader. "You are an intruder, here, and are consequently under arrest!"

"How am I an intruder, sir?"

"Because ye are! Ye read the notice, didn't ye, as ye rode into town?"

"I did."

"Well, that told ye to take back trail. Ye didn't do it, an' so you'll have to take the consequences. This hyer camp is a private cemetery, an' we don't allow no intruders."

"Indeed! What are you but intruders?"

"We're guardians of the dead, put here to see that the town ain't disturbed!"

"Bah! That won't work on me. Whoever or whatever you are, you don't care much for the dead. You've got a lay mere profitable than that, or I'm a fool."

"Well, you're a fool, then. This is a sacred spot, this Dead City, and whoever intrudes here, contrary to the posted orders, commits a sacrilege that forfeits his or her life. Throw up your hands and surrender. Refuse at your peril!"

Deadwood Dick saw at once that it was useless if not perilous to attempt resistance, for the gang had the drop on him sure enough, and they were not the sort of men to brook trifling, as their evil, sullen expression of countenance betokened.

"It is not necessary for me to throw up my arms!" Dick returned, "because if you pronounce me under arrest, that is enough. What do you propose to do with me?"

"Throw up your hands!" the leader of the gang ordered, savagely. "You'll find out what we are going to do with you, soon enough!"

The click of the leveled revolvers warned Dick to obey, and accordingly, he did so. He was at once disarmed, and relieved of his watch and money; then his hands were bound behind his back.

The captors advanced to the bar and helped themselves to a round of drinks, after which they led Deadwood Dick from the hotel by a rear door, to a spot where seven horses were in waiting.

One of the ruffians mounted, and being given the bridle-straps of the other horses, rode off, leading them after him.

The other five then re-entered the hotel, forcing Dick to accompany them, and bidding him be seated at one of the tables, proceeding to help themselves to more liquor at the bar.

All of which was a cause of no little wonderment to Deadwood Dick.

Who or what were they, and what did they intend to do with him?

Without doubt they were outlaws, or, at any rate, desperadoes.

But their movements puzzled him.

Were they waiting for some one to join them, or were they purposely lingering at the Big Nugget in order to fill up on the free supply of whisky?

And, too, what had become of Bug-Juice Bob? Had he been captured?

Dick judged not.

It was possible, however, that he had been killed outright.

It grew dark within the Big Nugget bar-room.

Four of the miners still lingered at the bar.

The fifth came and sat near Deadwood Dick to prevent him from escaping.

He appeared to be the leader, as near as Dick could judge, owing to the dense darkness.

"What are you waiting here for?" Dick asked, finally growing impatient to know what his fate was to be.

"Waitin' fer the boss to cum back!" was the gruff reply.

"Ah! Who's the boss?"

"Colonel Choker!"

"Humph! a suggestive name. Where's the colonel gone?"

"Off a-huntin', cuss him! Ef he'd break his neck it would be a good thing!"

"What's your name?"

"None o' yer bizness."

"Thank you. They have some funny handles up in these parts, I see."

"My name's Bloody Jake!" the man condescended to assert, after a moment. "I'm boss o' my gang, an' I'm a bad customer!"

"Your looks belie you, then. At first sight I took you for a parson. How'd you all lose yo' left eyes?"

"Fightin'!"

"Indeed! What's to be done with me?"

"Dunno—kill ye, I s'pose. Jest accordin' how the colonel feels."

"Have you captured my companion yet?"

"Oh, he's all right!" was the unsatisfactory response.

An hour more elapsed; then one of the men left the hotel.

He was absent half an hour, when he returned, and made the sententious announcement of:

"All right!"

The gang then regaled themselves at the bar once more, after which Dick was hustled from the room into the street.

Here he was suddenly raised bodily in the arms of four of the men, while the fifth held a sponge to his lips as they walked along.

The sponge was well saturated with chloroform, which Dick was forced to inhale, and in spite of his efforts to resist the effects, he soon felt oblivion enshrouding him.

Then all became blank!

When he awoke it was with the consciousness that his head ached fearfully. He lay perfectly still until his brain gradually became clearer, when he opened his eyes, and gazed inquiringly about him.

He was lying upon his side on a sort of upholstered lounge in a large room which was lit by several lamps.

The ceiling of the room was high and appeared to be of some chalky substance. From ceiling to skin-carpeted floor, pended magnificent damask curtains on all four sides of the room. The fur of the carpet was uppermost, and there was, besides the couch, in the way of furniture, several cushioned easy-chairs, and a handsomely-carved round-top center-table.

Dick could scarcely believe the evidence of his senses, as he gazed about, and wondered if he had been transported into some oriental palace.

He was the only visible occupant of the apartment at the time he awoke, but in a few minutes afterward the curtains were pulled aside and two persons entered.

After getting a good look at them through his half-closed eyelids, Dick made up his mind to feign that he was unconscious yet—at any rate for a time, for he was in hopes he might overhear something to his advantage.

The first of the twain was a man of large build and rather stately carriage. He had a full round face, a handsome mustache, and keen gray eyes, and, despite his portliness, was probably not over twenty-seven or eight years of age.

He was well-dressed in citizen's garb, of Eastern cut, and a diamond pin threw out dazzling rays from his shirt-front.

The second person was a woman of medium height and possessed of a charming figure, that was both suggestive of girlishness and womanliness, and showed off to advantage in a neat-fitting dress of some dark material.

With such a figure might naturally be expected to go a pretty face; but if the woman was possessed of such, it was not for other eyes to gaze upon, for over it, she wore a thick veil, through which apertures had been made to enable her to see and breathe.

Only the tip of her chin, her fair throat, and a bit of her forehead were left unmasked.

Her hair was brown, wavy and luxuriant and becomingly arrayed.

She wore no ornaments except a little bunch of wild flowers.

"Yes, there is trouble brewing, Shasta, and I'm all upset about it!" the man said, as they entered. "Here is the fellow that came to-day, and I've no doubt that he's one of the advance-guard of the gang that's coming. I see he has not yet recovered from the effects of the chloroform."

They came close to the couch and gazed down at the ex-Prince of the Road for several seconds.

"He's not a bad-looking fellow," the man went on. "Have you ever seen such a looking fellow before?—for you say yours has been a wild and adventurous life, Shasta."

"So it has, sir. And I think I have not only seen men who look like this man, but I am quite sure I have seen him somewhere before."

"Indeed? Perhaps, then, you could pronounce his name?"

"Yes. If he is the person I think he is, he is one whose name has become famous all over the Far West—Deadwood Dick!"

The portly young man gave vent to a slight whistle, indicative of surprise.

"Deadwood Dick!—the famous road-agent?"

"The same."

"Then it is fortunate perhaps that I have captured him, for I may be able to enlist him in my service. Something must surely be done, for if the coming band of prospectors are not sent on the back trail, a part of them may conclude to locate permanently in the pocket, and thus bar out all possibility of my ever realizing my present expectations."

"Then it is sure that there is a band of prospectors en route for Dead City?"

"Yes. During my absence I satisfied myself beyond the question of a doubt on the matter. There is a regular stampede of miners and the attendant swarm of adventurers, coming here, and are liable to make their appearance to-morrow."

"For your sake, sir, I am sorry to hear it. What do you propose to do?"

"That's what I don't know. My men are not numerically strong enough to keep the crowd out of Dead City, I fear. But one thing I have sworn: Until my mission here is accomplished, I will make it uncomfortably warm for all who try to take up their residence in the pocket. Do you think I could win this Deadwood Dick to my side?"

"I do not know. If the man is Deadwood Dick, he is invincible as a friend, and equally powerful as an enemy."

"Bah for his enmity! If I cannot make terms with him, he'll never see the light of day again—at least, not until I am ready to say good-by to this place."

"Shasta, when I have completed my mission here, I shall go far away—East, most likely, where gold will purchase luxury, independence and position. But I do not intend to go alone. You must go with me as my wife. You must let me see your face, which I know is pretty, and you must be mine. I care not to know of your past—let both our past lives remain as a dead-letter, while we look to the future for luxury and pleasure. Tell me, Shasta, may I hope that you will consider my hasty and informal proposal?"

The masked woman shrunk back a pace.

"You surprise me, Mr. Bingham!" she said, quickly, "and I must beg of you not to propose such a thing again. I know nothing of you, but did I know you to be the best and most honorable man in existence, it could make no difference to me. I hired out to you as a servant, and as such I wish you to consider me. What my past may have been can concern no one. This mask shall assist to conceal my identity as long as I live, and I shall remain as I am, simply Shasta Kate. If you wish a wife do not seek after me; I shall never marry!"

Bingham looked discomfited.

"You may change your mind?" he suggested.

"By no means. I will act as your servant, for a time, providing you treat me as such; but I want no lover-like consideration from you, nor any one else."

"Very well; I'll not annoy you. You may go, now. I shall remain here until this fellow awakens."

With a slight bow, Shasta Kate turned and left the room.

When she was gone, the man approached the couch, and seizing Deadwood Dick by the shoulder, shook him, vigorously.

Allowing him to shake for awhile, Dick finally opened his eyes, and sat up.

"Well, what is it you want?" he demanded, in a tone by no means pleasant.

"I am here to have a talk with you!" Bingham replied. "I am Colonel Choker, the owner of Dead City."

"Oh! you are, eh? Well, how does that concern me?"

"You will have an opportunity to find out, no doubt. Who are you?"

"Nightshade Nick!"

"Alias, Deadwood Dick!"

"Well, suit yourself as to that. I don't know as it can make much difference with my welfare whatever you may choose to call me."

"You are Deadwood Dick, nevertheless. You have boldly ventured into the forbidden paradise, over which I rule, as king. You are not the first one who has disregarded the warning for all new-comers to take the back trail. Others than you have invaded Dead City, in defiance of that warning, and what do you suppose was their fate?"

"Death, very likely!" Dick declared, composedly.

"To some—yes!" Colonel Choker replied, grimly—"to others, a fate far worse—everlasting imprisonment where the light of day can never reach them."

"Indeed! Well, what else?"

"You have defied my orders but I have deferred passing sentence upon you until I could have a talk with you!"

"Or, in other words, until you could learn if you could not make me a member of your cut-throat gang—a tool of your evil schemes!" Dick suggested, with a sarcastic smile.

The colonel started, and gazed sharper at his prisoner.

"Do I understand that you overheard me talking with another person, a bit ago?" he demanded.

"It is quite likely you do!" Dick replied. "I overheard your conversation with the woman you addressed as Shasta."

"Humph! Well, it matters but little if you did. Do you know the woman?"

"Not that I am aware of. It would appear, however, that she has seen me, on some former occasion!"

"You are Deadwood Dick, then?"

"I reckon I am. I read a newspaper account, not long ago, to the effect that I was dead, but from all I can learn, I am still alive!"

"It would perhaps be a mercy, so far as you are concerned, if the newspaper account had not been a mistake!" Choker said, dryly, "for if you do not come to my terms, you'll be imprisoned where the others are. What I told Shasta is true. The Dead City is to be invaded by a horde of prospectors, whose coming will injure some individual plans I have. These people must be driven off or killed and you must do it!"

"I must?"

"You must. It is the only condition that will save you from everlasting incarceration. If the invaders cannot be driven out by warnings, they must add to Dead City's already large inanimate census—must be killed by the wholesale! And you and the One-Eyed Vultures must do the job!"

Deadwood Dick regarded Choker, grimly.

"You infernal wretch!" he exclaimed. "Do you for a moment suppose that I would become involved in such a shocking butchery? You make very light of murder to reckon on me as an accessory to such an inhuman scheme!"

"Bah! The invaders will be warned to turn back, before they enter Dead City. If they come on in defiance of the warning, they come to their death, and their fate will be their own fault. Do you refuse to serve me, as I have outlined?"

"Most assuredly!"

"Then, say a long good-by to the fair world in which you have achieved such a wide-spread notoriety. You go hence, to your living tomb!"

He placed a small whistle to his lips and blew a sharp shrill blast.

Almost instantly the six men whom Dick had seen at the Big Nugget Hotel, in Dead City, entered and stood in waiting.

"Seize yonder prisoner, and away with him!" the colonel ordered. "Before you dump him remove the bonds that bind him!"

The ruffians, grim-visaged and evil-eyed, advanced, and seizing Deadwood Dick as though he were but a child, bore him from the room and the presence of Colonel Choker, whose mandate, evidently, was their only law and gospel.

Poor Dick!

Well might he wonder, with a feeling of horror stealing over him into what sort of a place or prison he was to be consigned.

CHAPTER VI.

THE MAIL-BAG STRUGGLE.

Two weeks after the occurrence of the scene just narrated, we look down once more upon Dead City, but this time not to find the camp the abode of the dead, but, to the contrary, exceedingly alive.

The warm spring sunshine dwelt caressingly upon a busy and cheerful scene. The two main streets of the town were thronged with pedestrians, and an occasional horseman; every habitation appeared to boast of occupancy; and that part of the pocket bottom not built up was even a busier scene than the inhabited section, for, with pick and shovel and pan, half a hundred or more of miners were actively engaged in tearing up the earth.

Every now and then, there was a hearty shout, as evidence of "pay-dirt" was found. Underlying the surface soil was an extensive sandy stratum—the "wash" of many a year, rich with auriferous particles, which were as a balm of Gilead to the miner's heart.

One thing was evident:—the stampede had come!

And the fact that there was plenty of "sign" that Dead City was the placer-camp of that par-

ticular part of the Territory, seemed to indicate that the stampede had come to stay.

The town was wild—afflicted with the insatiable crazy "fever" which possesses every mining district from the moment a paying "find" is struck, until the camp begins to "peter out."

Every inch of available space had already been staked out into claims, and these claims had been divided and sub-divided, and changed hands with great rapidity, commanding startling prices.

Not a few sagacious miners, who had first staked out claims or locates, preferred to sell them for a fat price, and then turn around and work for big wages as laborers.

It is these men who, in the ups and downs of mushroom mining life, generally come out with enough "sand" to prevent the necessity of their quitting a camp on their "uppers."

Beside the miners in the pocket was a crowd of speculators and adventurers, who stood ready to snap up a claim the minute there was enough "wash" to make it reasonably certain said claim was likely to pan out well.

As for Dead City proper, it enjoyed the prosperity usual with every booming camp.

The defunct residents of former days, owing to the prospective value of the gulch bottom, had been given a float down the stream, that being the easiest as well as the most economical way of getting rid of them.

The incoming horde had included merchants, gamblers, and adventurers of all sorts peculiar to the average flash mining-town; consequently, within a week's time, after the arrival of the new crowd, business of nearly every sort had sprung into existence along the course of the two rival streets.

The Big Nugget Hotel, however, was the chief place where "bug-juice" was dispensed, and accordingly was the popular resort of the camp. It had been doubled in size to meet the demand for accommodations, and new attractions had been added to the huge bar-room, in the shape of a stage and faro-table.

Something like three hundred people were already in the camp, and the prospects were that double that number would arrive within the space of another week, as the news had been sent out that Dead City was the biggest sort of a success.

The day on which we look down upon the metamorphosed camp was the one set for the arrival of the first mail and passenger stage, from the nearest but distant town.

Of course, there were but few expected any mail, yet that made no difference. Miners in those "way back camps" look with as much eagerness for the arrival of the stage, when not expecting any mail, as though they were to receive a pouchful.

The day was advanced to past the noonday hour, when a shout gave warning that the stage was coming, and there was a general rush to the vicinity of the Big Nugget Hotel.

And here the stage with its six-in-hand, finally drew up, both coach and horses looking considerably the worse for their first journey to the ominously-named mining-camp.

A gigantic, weather-beaten mountaineer held the reins, and beside him was the girl sport whom we described in the opening chapter—Ferret Fan.

Within the stage was crowded as many persons as could be squeezed into it, while on top, the same state of affairs prevailed, some passengers having barely room to sit and leave their legs dangling over the sides.

As soon as the stage stopped, the Jehu tossed the mail-bag into the midst of the waiting crowd, when there was a precipitate scramble and a rough-and-tumble fight for its possession, and the honor of carrying the first mail into the Big Nugget, for distribution.

It was no slight skirmish, but a genuine, lusty fight. Men of the mines don't often hustle one another, for the fun of the thing, but when they enter a *melee* are in dead earnest.

And so it was in the struggle for the mail.

The man who should come off victorious, and bear the prize into the Big Nugget, would be afterward looked upon as a "double-barreled cuss from Cusstown," and become popular to such an extent as to be an object of envy in the eyes of many of the "toughs" and "citizens."

Wild oaths, fierce yells, groans, curses, the clash of steel, the reports of fire-arms—such were the sounds that arose above that writhing, squirming mass of humanity—that test the endurance, strength and grit, in which more than half a hundred men were involved.

Kansas Jim, who drove the hearse—and who, if he did not lie, had participated in a hundred pitched battles for life or death—stood up, on

his seat, and clapped his hands and applauded vociferously—his stentorian yells making the mountain-locked pocket resound with echoes, while the other passengers looked on, some startled and alarmed, others curious, and eager to mark the winning man.

At last, after full five minutes' desperate fight, the battle ended, as suddenly as it had begun, almost.

A man, with the mail-bag held high above his head—a man wild-eyed, hatless, and with the clothes half-torn from his body—a man with the blood flowing from half a dozen wounds—such a man was seen bounding over the tops of the heads of the howling mob, and to vanish within the hotel.

When it was seen that he had escaped with the prey the crowd became suddenly silent.

But it was only for a minute.

Then there rung out in stentorian voice the shout of a miner, who was himself bleeding all too freely:

"Rah! boys, hip! hip! hooray fer ther victor!"

And the invitation—a crimson toast it might be called—was responded to with a vengeance, a wild simultaneous shout awakening the echoes.

It was not a vengeful shout, but rather a shout commending the success of the victor.

There were at least a score of wounded and bleeding men in that crowd, but they all had entered the struggle for "honor" and would not "squeal," whatever their injuries.

Let us look after the victor.

Leaping from the heads or shoulders of the mob to the veranda, he dashed into the hotel bar-room and flung the bag to Handsome Hank, the man who ran the "shebang," and stood behind the bar in waiting to receive the mail.

Then the conqueror would have quickly sought more private apartments, but was at once surrounded by a crowd of congratulating admirers and had by far too few hands to accommodate the many who were eager for a shake with the gamest man in Dead City.

He had won the prize, and rough though the men of the mountain town were, they were not ashamed to acknowledge their defeat by a hearty hand-shake with the winner.

He was a medium-sized young man, perhaps twenty-four years of age, with brown hair and mustache. His face would have been rather prepossessing but for the fact that it was now cut and bloody.

And as for his clothing, it had been half-torn from him.

Seeing that he must go through the ceremony of hand-shaking, he received the congratulations of the crowd gracefully, and finally managed to get away and escape to his room.

Here he dressed his wounds, which were not serious, and supplied himself with a new suit of clothes from his trunk, thus bettering his appearance considerably.

He then once more descended to the bar-room and office of the hotel.

The scanty mail had already been distributed, and the office was less crowded.

As the young man entered the office, he found himself face to face with a person he had least expected to meet.

The recognition, too, appeared to be mutual.

The man whom the victor found confronting him was the huge bulk of avoirdupois we have met once before—Jonathan Jester.

"Harold Haines, by all that's wonderful!" he ejaculated, putting out his hand. "Why, I thought you were in California!"

"Did you?" Haines replied, rather dryly. "I've not been in California in five months—not since the unfortunate marriage of Lelia Harrison to Rex Ravel."

"Ah! yes. I remember, now, that you were a suitor for Lelia's hand."

"Yes. After the unfortunate match, I left Sacramento, and plunged into the wilderness."

"I suppose you heard of what followed?"

"Yes. I heard the report that Ravel had robbed his father-in-law, and absconded, and that Lelia's sister, Flora, had eloped with him."

"Such was the case. The affair broke the hearts of Harrison and his wife, and was the prime cause of their deaths. But, the strangest part of the affair was the old man's will, which left everything, except a mere pittance, to Ravel!"

"The deuce, you say! But their child—"

"His name, like his father's, was Rexford S. Ravel. But, that made no difference, you see. The will failed to state which Rexford S. Ravel the bequest was to go to. Without a doubt it was meant for the child, but there was no clause to prove that such was the intent of the testator. Lelia pushed the matter into the courts, and, as

a result, the jury gave the elder Ravel the benefit of the doubt, and decided that the fortune belonged to him!"

"And the money was paid over to Ravel?"

"No. The will made me custodian of the money, until it was claimed by the heir. The court gave me instructions to hunt up Ravel, and pay him the money. So in company with his lawyer—an unscrupulous fellow named Spriggins, who had engineered the case—I set out for this place, where Ravel was said to reside. Before we got out of California, Spriggins attempted to rob me, and I was forced to kill him, in defense of my life."

"Then you have brought the money with you?"

"Yes."

"Then you'd better look out for yourself, and let drop no hint that you carry such a sum, for there are plenty of men in this camp who would not hesitate to murder you, to get possession of it!"

"So I am aware. How long have you been here, in Dead City?"

"I came with the stampede, a couple of weeks ago."

"Have you seen anything of Rex Ravel here?"

"No!"

"Strange! Spriggins assured me he was here."

"Quite unlikely. There was not an inhabitant here when the stampede arrived. If Ravel is here, he is either cleverly disguised, or else is hiding."

Harold Haines went on:

"It will not be well for Rex Ravel if I meet him, after the way he treated poor Lelia. Even though she jilted me for him, I will avenge her wrongs. Where is she, and her son, now?"

"I do not know. At last accounts they were somewhere up in this territory in search of Flora."

"They will never find her, it is likely. I can give you some news in regard to her, however. She never eloped with Rex Ravel as reported."

"What?"

"Just as I say. She did not elope with him. Instead, she eloped with a strolling actor, named Argyle, who had been playing with a company in Sacramento, and with whom she had become smitten. As their flight was almost simultaneous with that of Rex Ravel, the supposition was naturally formed that she had fled with him."

"This seems incredible."

"It is true, nevertheless. She and Argyle started for Leadville, where he was to play. *En route* he was killed. She wrote back to me for money to get her home. I sent it, and wrote her, also, the disgraceful cloud that had settled upon her name. I never heard from her afterward."

"Well, this is news, indeed!" Jonathan Jester said, "and will in some measure lift a weight from Mrs. Ravel's mind when she hears of it. I never saw this sister, Flora, although I and her father were friends of long standing. I hear she was remarkably pretty."

"So she was. Hers, however, was a boydenish, vivacious style of beauty, where Lelia's was of a more quiet and refined type."

"I presume, should Rex Ravel die, you would renew your suit for the hand of his widow?" Jester interrogated with a smile.

"I don't know. In case Rex Ravel dies before you deliver the money to him—what then?"

"Why, I shall place the fortune in his wife's hands, for the benefit of her young son."

The declaration seemed to please Harold Haines, for he nodded his approval.

And there entered his eyes a gleam, which might have been interpreted to mean:

"Look out for yourself, Rex Ravel, senior, for that fortune shall never belong to you!"

As the two men continued their chat, a door opened, and the girl sport, Ferret Fan, entered the bar-room.

Harold Haines saw her as she entered, and clutched Jester's elephantine arm, convulsively.

"Ha! look! Do you see that girl?"

"Yes! yes! What of her?"

"Why, that is Flora Harrison!"

CHAPTER VII.

IN THE CRYPT.

LET us turn back and see what became of Deadwood Dick.

After passing beyond the curtains that lined the walls of Colonel Choker's luxurious apartment, Dick's captors bore him through a doorway into a wide hallway with high, vaulted ceiling.

The hall was lighted by lanterns, and the ex-Prince of the Road was enabled to make some note of his surroundings.

He saw that the walls and ceiling were of solid rock, and concluded that the passage was hewn into the bowels of the mountains—probably the handiwork of some past and gone race, whose presence in Arizona is now attested by the remains of whole cities which have been found in various parts of the wild region.

Along this hall Dick was carried by his grim captors.

For several minutes the march continued; then they entered a sort of caldron-shaped cavern, and descended a steep incline to its bottom.

Here Deadwood Dick was placed upon his feet, as the Vultures came to a halt.

One of the ruffians had brought a lantern along from the hall, and deposited it on a rock.

There was a black round hole in the bottom of the cavern, several feet in circumference, out of which arose an odor that was far from pleasant to the sense of smelling.

"There! that's yer tomb!" the leader of the gang announced, gruffly. "That's the colonel's prison-pen, an' them as goes down through that hole never gits out ag'in. We chucks 'em down some grub 'casionaly, tho', an' I reckon they gits on fair to middling."

"What kind of a place is it?" Dick demanded, with difficulty repressing a shudder.

"Dunno! Never was down there. Reckon you'll find out. Ef you've got any prayers ter say be quick about it!"

Dick glanced around him, with an observant eye.

"This is a gold-mine!" he said.

"You bet, an' a daisy, too—but it won't pan out nary an ounce fer you. Aire you ready?"

"As ready as I shall ever be, likely!"

Without another word the ruffians seized hold of him, and raising him in the air, pitched him headforemost down through the hole into the unknown depths below.

Down! down! went Deadwood Dick, and in their eagerness to peer after him and listen, one of the ruffians knocked over the lantern, and it, too, rolled over into the pit.

Terrified at being left in the awful darkness, the Vultures turned and fled from the spot.

Down! went Deadwood Dick, until, ker-souse! he plunged into a pool of foul-smelling water, which proved to be neck deep.

The lantern came down almost as quickly as he did, but as good-luck would have it, did not go out as it too struck the water, when with the sudden inspiration of hope he managed to catch the ring of it between his teeth and raise it above water.

His feet were tied, and likewise his hands.

How was he to help himself?

By aid of the lantern, he was able to make out that the pool covered but a small space, and was situated in a rugged cavern, or subterranean chamber, not unlike that from which he had descended.

The ceiling was full twenty feet above.

So far as Dick could see, there were no other prisoners in the place.

After taking a good look around, he began to try to work his way out of the pool, inch by inch.

It was a Godsend the lantern had accompanied him, for it would have been a most horrible fate to be in that place in total darkness.

At last, after ten minutes of struggle, he managed to get out of the water basin; then he set the lantern down on the rocky floor.

He found that the bonds about his feet were slipping, owing to being water-soaked, and after some working he so stretched them that his feet were freed.

He then arose, wondering how he would get his hands loose, they being fastened behind his back.

As he gazed around, he uttered a cry of astonishment.

Upon a boulder, a few feet away, sat a human being, and he none other than Bug-juice Bob, who laughed gruffly, as he saw the surprise depicted upon Dick's countenance.

"Hillo! How'd ye cum down, friend Nightshade?" he demanded, with a grin.

"Dropped!" Dick replied. "Come and unloosen my hands."

The tramp obeyed, and then the two stared at each other, inquiringly.

"Well, were you pitched down through the hole?" Dick asked.

"You bet, an' nigh broke my neck. Hev bin wonderin' ef I war in—"

And he named a supposed place.

"Might as well be, I dare say!" Dick declared.

"Have you explored the place?"

"Nary explore. Too many snakes!"

"Snakes?"

"You bet—reg'lar old hisser!"

"Pshaw! I see what's the matter with you;—you miss your whisky!"

"Nary! I told the gang I hed a tooth fer 'bug,' an' they took compassion on me, an' tossed down a couple of canteens o' regular old throat-skinner, after me. Ef ye don't b'lieve there's snakes, fetch the glim, an' come ahead!"

Dick obeyed, and they advanced into the depths of the chamber.

It then became evident, for a second time, that Bug-juice was not a wholesale liar.

Myriads of snakes, both large and small, ran across their path, hissing and protruding their forked tongues, in a manner horrible to see.

"Ain't I level?" Bug-juice Bob demanded, with a chuckle. "What d'yer call 'em, snakes, or hop-toads?"

"I should say they were real snakes, not jim-jams nor bad dreams."

They went on with their exploration.

New surprises awaited them, at every step.

The chamber was a veritable crypt!

Every little ways, they found a human skeleton, or some dismembered portion of one.

They were not skeletons, however, of persons who had died recently.

The shape of the skulls, and certain other peculiarities, proclaimed that they were the bones of some past-and-gone race.

Among the whole assortment not one had the appearance of having belonged to an animate form, within a century, most of them being green with age.

It was a veritable chamber of horrors and the two men eagerly and anxiously sought for an outlet from the awful tomb, but except the black hole far up in the ceiling, through which they had made their unceremonious descent, there apparently was no exit.

When they had finished their exploration, they returned to the edge of the pool, which was about the only place where there were no snakes.

"Well! what do you think of the prospect?" Deadwood Dick asked, when they had perched themselves, respectively, upon a couple of bowlders. "Do you reckon we'll ever get out of here?"

"It don't luk much like it, I'll swear!" Bug-juice Bob replied, sourly. "What we goin' ter do when ther glim goes out?"

"I don't know. Maybe we'd better put it out, and reserve it for a future occasion!"

"But, the snakes! Gora-mighty! they'll eat us up alive!"

The thought of being attacked by the hideous reptiles caused both men to shudder.

"I have a couple of dozen matches in the lining of my hat!" Dick said. "But they won't be of much account, when the oil in the lantern is used up!"

Their situation was indeed desperate.

They dare not extinguish the light, for fear of snakes, and so turned it down, to a mere glimmer and left it burning.

The hours passed slowly, and the two prisoners discussed their prospects until they wearied of talking.

Then, they took turns at obtaining a few minutes' sleep, one or the other remaining awake, to keep off the serpents.

Thus the night passed away, and they knew, finally, that another day must have dawned in the outer world.

Then, knowing not what else to do, they took the lantern and set out once more to explore the crypt, having no idea, in the mean time, but what their search would be fruitless.

And so it proved, after a half-hour's clambering among the rugged bowlders and rude passages.

"It's no go," Deadwood Dick said, in a discouraged tone. "We might as well save our boot-leather, and give it up as a bad job."

"That's my idea, too," Bug-juice agreed.

"But 'twon't pay ter git down in speerits!" and here he helped himself to a nip from one of his quart canteens of whisky. "Jest try a bit o' this 'ere throat-tickler, an' I'm durned ef et won't set ye way up in G!"

This time Dick did not refuse. He needed something to stimulate him, for he felt decidedly "blue."

He took a light draught; then they set out on their return to the pool, when suddenly Deadwood Dick paused.

"A current of air," he said, holding out his hand, "and it comes up from below!"

"Et ain't no air!" Bug-juice announced, with a sniff. "I'm a fang-toothed liar ef it ain't gas—natteral gas! Try a match to et."

Nothing loth, Deadwood Dick hastened to obey.

The moment he applied a lighted match to the

current that issued from a crevice in the rocky floor, a jet of brilliant flame shot up high above their heads, and illuminated that inner chamber in every part.

"Luck aire wi' us!" Bug-juice Bob cried, with enthusiasm, "an' we sha'n't fall short o' glim."

The gas geyser burned furiously, and showed no signs of waning.

But now that they had light, another question arose: what were they to subsist on?

This was satisfactorily answered, a few hours later, when a noise in the outer chamber attracted their attention, and proceeding to the vicinity of the pool they discovered a whole leg of venison, which evidently had been dropped down from the upper chamber and landed on the rocks beside the pool.

There was enough of it to last them several days, and they were not slow in making their way back to the illuminated cavern and there roasting the savory meat by the gas-fire, had a sumptuous repast.

Time dragged on.

Long, weary hours merged into days, and still the two prisoners in the crypt found no method of escape.

They received meat every other day, and so did not suffer except from the monotony of their penned-up existence.

Bug-juice Bob's stock of whisky expired before the end of the first week, and for the next two or three days he came near collapsing for the want of more. He was nervous, irritable, and half-crazed.

The mood gradually wore away however, and then he became more like his natural self.

What was, as near as they could calculate, the thirteenth day of their stay in that horrible hole, proved to be the last.

When they awoke in the morning—for since the lighting of the natural gas, there were no snakes in the chamber to prevent both sleeping at the same time—a surprise awaited them, and a most agreeable one, too.

Seated near where they had been lying was no less a personage than Shasta Kate!

Both men quickly arose and stared at her with expressions of eagerness.

"You here?" Dick exclaimed. "Are you too a victim of Colonel Choker's devilishment?"

"I am here!" was the calm reply, "but not as a prisoner. Did Choker know of my presence here my life would not be worth a penny."

"Then you have come to set us at liberty?"

"Perhaps. It will all depend whether you agree to my conditions or not!"

"What are they?"

"You must permit me to blindfold you and promise me to make no attempt to remove the bandages until I shall have had time to get out of your sight—five minutes at least. Swear to do this and I will lead you to liberty!"

"I swear to respect your wish, in the fullest!"

Deadwood Dick assented without hesitation.

"An' yer kin bet yer Sunday-go-ter-meetin' socks, I'll never ann'int me larnyx wi' liquid hornet ef them ain't my sentiments, too!" Bug-juice Bob affirmed, holding up his hand.

"Very well. There's no time to be lost and so you will permit me to blindfold you," Shasta said, briefly.

She produced a couple of heavy cloth bandages and soon had the prisoners' eyes so covered that it was impossible for them to see.

Taking one by each shoulder she then told them to march.

They obeyed, and continued for some ten minutes, by which time a change of temperature made them aware that they were out of the crypt, and probably in some passage.

A walk of ten minutes more, perhaps, and they felt grass and yielding soil beneath their feet. They still continued on for several minutes, during which time Dick formed the idea that they were going around and around in a circle.

Finally she brought them to a halt and said:

"Now, gentlemen, you are at liberty, but I shall expect you to wait five minutes before removing your bandages, according to promise."

"We will do so," Deadwood Dick replied.

Then they heard her move away.

When he thought the five minutes had expired, Dick tore away the blindfold, Bug-juice doing likewise.

They found themselves standing in Dead City pocket, but a few hundred yards from the camp. Day was just breaking and the town was getting astir.

But Shasta Kate was gone from view.

"Free, be thunder!" ejaculated Bug-juice Bob.

"Sure enough—free, but penniless!" Dick re-

plied, idly thrusting his hand into his coat pocket.

As he did so, his hand came in contact with something, and drawing it forth, it proved to be a roll of bank notes, around which was pinned a slip of paper, containing feminine chirography.

The face of Deadwood Dick expressed great astonishment, as well as eagerness, as he read what was written.

It was as follows:

"DEADWOOD DICK!—Here is money to help you get out of Dead City. I'd advise you to go, as your life is not safe here. And, though we both have passed thro' many bitter experiences, let us not go down the hill of life hating one another. I have much to forgive and to have forgiven. I have also given you your life. Take it as a present from one who wronged you. Take it and go; but never waste time planting flowers or shedding tears over the grave you made in the mountains,* for the woman you buried there, was not

"CALAMITY JANE."

CHAPTER VIII.

BUG-JUICE BOB COMMISSIONED.

If ever there was a surprised person, it was Deadwood Dick.

And, moreover, he was deeply affected by what he read, although he endeavored to hide his emotion so that Bug-juice Bob would not notice it.

Could he believe it?—was Calamity Jane still alive?

He was positive that she it was whom he had buried, months before; yet this paper seemed to aver that she was not dead—ay! and his quick intuition now led him to the conviction that his wife was indeed alive.

When the hand of Shasta Kate had touched him, a strange inexplicable thrill had affected him that he could not account for.

He knew the reason, now.

It was Calamity's hand that had touched him—Calamity, who, in the guise of Shasta Kate, had given him his liberty!

She was alive!—had forgiven all the strange past—ay! herself yearned for forgiveness, and to be united to him once more!

The very thought thrilled him with a wild, tumultuous feeling of commingled happiness and pain.

Perhaps there were never two human beings more suited to each other, than he and Calamity—both wild, restless spirits—both brave, and devoted to their purpose with recklessness born of their wild lives.

How long he would have stood staring at the paper and money is hard to say, had not Bug-juice Bob aroused him.

"Say thar! What's ther fang-toothed racket, Nightshade?" he demanded. "Whar'd ye git the fly-blisters?"

"The girl who rescued us put the money in my pocket!" Dick answered, looking up.

"She did, hey? Good gal! Goin' ter divvy, ain't yer?"

"How much do you want?"

"'Nuff ter hire me board fer a year, an' buy a bar'l o' fusil 'ile."

"Get out! Here's a ten-dollar note."

"Thankee! I'll tend yer funeral, an' see ther lid's screwed on right, fer that. I'm off now, ter git my tank full up ter ther chime. Tra-la-lee!"

"But hold on! Don't be in a hurry."

"Well, hurry up, fer I kin feel the liquid hornet oozin' down me gullet nigh a'ready."

"If you know when you're well off, you'll let the 'bug' alone. I want you to do me a favor."

"What's ther racket, pard?"

"Go to the camp and get me a false beard of some sort, and fetch it out here to that clump of bushes yonder, where I'll wait."

"What fer ye'r goin' to mask, pard?"

"Fer reasons of my own."

"Where'll I get the whiskers?"

"Why, you'll have to find out. I see the camp is now peopled. Likely, if you can find a Jew shop, you can get what I want; but if there's no Jew shop, then canvass the crowd. If you are sharp-eyed you're likely to find some chap who wears a false beard. I've known dozens of men in a town to thus keep their identity under an eclipse."

"Well, what then?"

"Why, snatch the beard, and make yourself scarce."

"Kerect. I'm off." And the tramp moved away, adding to himself:

"Let me see. He's ter wait till I come back."

*See "Deadwood Dick's Claim," Half-Dime No. 36.

That'll be hours from now. Afore I kin hev ther red-headed audacity ter snatch onter a feller's face riggin', I shall hev ter get as b'ilin' drunk as a flimsy X will make me, asides ther time et'll take me ter find me man. Howsum-ever, Mr. Nightshade Nick, ye kin look fer me, when ther song-birds uv evenin' hev ceased to twitter, an' ther stars fasten their sparklin' radiance on ther bald pate uv ther nocturnal, perambulatin' American eagle. Wi' sum, et's—

"First in luv, first in war;

but wi' me et's

"First in bug-juice, second in slumber!"

And accordingly it seemed doubtful if Dick would get the coveted disguise right away.

CHAPTER IX.

FERRET FAN OFFERS A REWARD.

THE words of Harold Haines caused Jonathan Jester to gaze toward Ferret Fan, and, as his eyes fell upon her, he nodded his head.

"Yes, friend Haines, I think I see a trace of resemblance to my old friend Harrison. I could not say positive that it is Flora, for I have not seen her since she was a child, owing to the fact that being something of an incorrigible, she was kept at school much of the time. The girl yonder, however, traveled on the same stage as I two different times since I entered Arizona—once as I was staging it to Redville, and again, on the stage that brought me to Dead City today."

"Indeed! Have you had any conversation with her?"

"Very little. She did not seem inclined to speak to me. Perhaps, however, it was because there is so much of me to speak to that she did not feel equal to the task!" and Jester's sides shook with laughter.

"That girl is certainly Flora Harrison, and yet she is not Flora Harrison!" Haines said, looking puzzled. "Flora Harrison, when I saw her last, was the possessor of beautiful blonde hair. This girl, as you perceive, has brown hair. Yet in face and figure she is the same."

"You might be mistaken. Resemblances most startling are often encountered."

"True, but I'd be almost willing to wager my life that I am not mistaken now!"

"Why don't you put the matter to a test, then?"

"What! all patched and plastered up as I am? Why, I'd frighten the poor girl into fits."

"Bah! Unless I miss my guess, she's not one of the sort to get skeered so easily."

"May be not. I've a mind to risk it."

He hesitated a moment, then approached where Ferret Fan stood, watching a faro game.

She turned as she felt a touch upon her shoulder and they came face to face.

"Why, Flora, how do you do?" Haines said, putting out his hand, cordially.

She took a step back and surveyed him coolly, no expression of recognition visible upon her pretty face.

"Sir? I presume you have made a mistake?" she said.

"I think not!" Haines persisted. "You are Flora Harrison, formerly of Sacramento, or I am greatly mistaken."

"Then you are greatly mistaken!" she replied, with a toss of the head.

"It seems incredible that two persons should resemble each other so," Haines continued, studying her so closely that a flush of embarrassment added color to her cheek. "Would you kindly favor me with your name?"

"I am called Ferret Fan by the few who know me!" she replied, and then turned abruptly, to watch the game.

Considering himself dismissed, Haines turned away, and rejoined Jonathan Jester, who had been watching the attempt with considerable interest.

"No go, eh?" he said, as Haines approached.

"No. She wouldn't have it. But if she is not Flora Harrison then I am the most deceived man in the world."

"Which is not at all improbable. As I remarked, resemblances are often startling. How about her hair?"

"I don't think it is a wig, as I first supposed. But, then, you know hair is readily dyed."

"True. What name did she give?"

"Said she was called Ferret Fan by those who knew her, and that I was certainly mistaken. That was all I could get out of her."

"And very likely you are mistaken."

"I am not yet satisfied on that point. What do you propose about the fortune business?"

"I shall await here several days—a couple of

weeks, perhaps. If Rex Ravel does not turn up during that time, I shall return to California and advertise, awaiting his orders."

The two men separated, Jester retiring to his room, as he said, to rest from the fatigue of his recent journey.

Harold Haines continued to haunt the bar-room, and it was seldom that his eyes were off the girl sport, who, after watching awhile, took her seat at the faro-table and bought a stack of chips.

If she was conscious that Haines was watching her she gave no token of the fact, either in expression or action.

She played for an hour, with good luck, and then arose.

Before her on the table lay quite a heap of gold coin and greenbacks.

"Gentlemen!" she said, "here's five hundred dollars, in clean cash, which I have fairly won. I don't often play for money, but I happened to be in need of this sum, and so I tried my luck. I will leave it deposited with the landlord of the house, and give you all an opportunity to secure it."

She swept the money into a little buckskin pouch, and tossed it over to the landlord, who was seated at the table. Then she took from her pocket and unfolded a printed one-sheet poster; then also drew out a tack-hammer and tacks, and crossing the room, she nailed the poster up in full view on the wall opposite the bar.

The *habitués* of the Big Nugget watched her with interest, and read what was printed upon the bill.

The contents were as follows:

"\$500 REWARD."

"I will pay a reward of five hundred dollars for the capture, alive, of the notorious outlaw known throughout the West as Deadwood Dick. The report that he is dead is false. Another, and an innocent man, was lynched in his stead. Deadwood Dick is alive, and in this vicinity, and I will pay the above reward to the person or persons who will deliver him into my custody."

"Signed, FERRET FAN."

The girl sport turned to the spectators.

"You see for yourselves," she said. "I want Deadwood Dick. The money awaits in the hands of the man who runs this shebang!"

She then walked up to the bar, purchased a drink of wine, and left the Big Nugget.

Harold Haines followed her, directly, and saw her saunter leisurely away toward where the miners were at work.

Later in the afternoon saw him walking in the immediate vicinity of the dense cluster of bushes, where Deadwood Dick had promised to await the return of Bug-juice Bob.

He gnawed away at the end of a cigar, as he strolled along, and his face wore a moody expression.

"Poor Lelia!" he muttered. "How much happier her lot might have been had she chosen me instead of that scoundrel, Rex Ravel!"

He uttered the words aloud, and his gaze—suddenly rested upon the face and form of Ferret Fan, who stood before him as suddenly, as though she had risen from out the earth.

There was a quiet smile upon her face, in contrast with his look of surprise.

"How do you do, Mr. Haines?" she said, putting out her hand.

"Eh?—you?—" he began, hardly knowing what to say.

"I am she who was once Flora Harrison!" she said, with a musical laugh.

"But you told me you were *not*, up at the Big Nugget?"

"Because I was not anxious to have any one know me by any other name than Ferret Fan."

Haines shook her hand warmly.

"I am glad to meet you!" he said. "I had not heard from you, of late."

"I wrote you at Sacramento, after you kindly sent me the money, but you had gone. Then I set out on the trail of vengeance!"

"Vengeance?"

"Yes. You saw the notice I posted up, in the Big Nugget bar-room?"

"Yes."

"Well, that's explanatory. My husband, Fred Argyle, was mistaken for the outlaw, Deadwood Dick, and lynched by the Vigilantes."

"You wrote me so."

"Well, I swore, then, that I would be revenged by taking Deadwood Dick's life, in exchange for Fred's—a life for a life, you know. I've been pretty close upon the trail, ever since, and have reason to believe that Deadwood Dick is either in this vicinity, now, or will be soon. So here I shall await my prey."

"I am afraid you have taken a job much too big for you, Flora!" Haines said, gravely. "I've

heard of this fellow, and when men can't get away with him how do you ever expect to?"

"It matters not how. I shall have my revenge, even if I die getting it. When I have finished Deadwood Dick, I've another wrong to avenge—the foul wrong Rex Ravel did my sister!"

"Bravo! you can count me in, on *that* score. I have, personally, sworn to hunt the scoundrel down, and force him to fight me!"

"Good! We will follow that trail, together. Do you know where Lelia and her child are?"

"Jester has informed me that she is wandering through Arizona, in search of you."

"Poor sister! How foolish of her!" Ferret Fan said, betraying considerable emotion. "She ought never to have attempted such a thing, for she has not the grit or experience of one fitted to travel through almost constant danger. You say Jester informed you. Who is he, pray?"

"I wrote to you about your father's singular will? Well, Jonathan Jester is the man to whom the main fortune was intrusted."

"Ah! yes, I see. The court decided that it belonged to Rex Ravel, and not to his child!"

"So it would appear."

"Where is Jonathan Jester?"

"Here, in Dead City. He came on the same stage with you."

"What!—not the fat man?"

"The same."

"What is he here for?"

"Why, you see, the court ordered him to pay over the fortune to Ravel, senior. Ravel's lawyer declared Ravel to be living here. The two set out, to bring the money here. While *en route*, Jester was forced to shoot the lawyer, for attempted robbery, and so came on alone."

"Then, is Rex Ravel here, in Dead City?" Ferret Fan demanded, with flashing eyes."

"That remains to be found out. I have been here, two weeks, and have seen nothing of him. If he is here, it is probable he is in hiding, or in disguise."

"Jester will pay the money to him if he personally demands it, then?"

"Without a doubt. Indeed, that is his lawful duty."

"Then, mark you, Harold Haines, you and I must work. The fortune belongs to my poor unfortunate sister's child, and Rex Ravel, the scoundrel, shall not touch a penny of it!"

"So say I. I am with you, hand and heart, on that score. Although your sister did not choose to accept of my love, I bear her no malice, and will be only too glad to fight in her cause."

"I believe you, Harold. It would have been much better had she linked her fate with yours!" Ferret Fan said, gravely. "Poor, innocent Lelia! She was always the lily of the family, while I was the hardy rose, and better able to bear up under the blight of misfortune. Poor Lelia! I wonder where she is now?"

"She is dead!" a voice announced, from the vicinity of the thicket near which they had been standing!

CHAPTER X.

WAR DECLARED.

THE words, uttered in an impressive tone, caused Ferret Fan and Haines to wheel about, with utterances of surprise.

Standing but a few feet away, with his arms folded across his breast, was the man who had spoken—Deadwood Dick!

"Hello! Who are you?" Ferret Fan demanded, suspiciously, her hand dropping to one of her revolvers.

"Nightshade Nick, at your service!" was the reply, and Dick advanced, fearlessly. "I am a detective, and was in the thicket, yonder, watching for a party, when I chanced to overhear your conversation, and caught on to some points I happened to be acquainted with."

"Indeed! What do you know about me, or about my sister?" Fan demanded, still regarding the ex-prince doubtfully.

"Of you—nothing, except what I learned by overhearing your conversation. Of your sister, I know somewhat more!"

"You say she is dead?" Haines spoke up. "What reason have you for making that assertion?"

"From the simple fact that I was called to her death-bed, some three weeks ago. To explain more fully, will require some time. If you care to listen, however, I will accommodate you."

"If you really know anything in regard to my sister, I shall be very glad to receive the news, sir," Ferret Fan said.

Accordingly, Deadwood Dick made known all about his singular nocturnal adventure, and visit to the camp of the Dumb Deveres.

"Then, my sister was not dead, when you were taken from her presence?" Fan asked, when Dick had completed his narration.

"No. But, if what she said be true, she probably did not live long afterward."

"God grant she may not be dead, yet! Do you think you could find the place where you saw her?"

"Possibly. But it would likely require weeks, and maybe months of active search."

"It don't matter, if it takes years. I *must* find my sister, or her remains. But, not yet! First I have a greater mission—to hunt down Rex Ravel, the wretch, the murderer, the human demon, and visit vengeance upon him."

"It would seem that the three of us were bent on one and the same purpose!" Dick added.

"Yes, if you propose to fulfill your promise to my sister. According to your report, little Rex is undoubtedly in his father's possession?"

"I presume so."

"And do you think Rex Ravel is in Dead City, or vicinity?"

"I haven't a doubt about the matter."

"And why not?"

Dick hesitated a moment, thoughtfully, and then went on and narrated his experience from the time of his arrival in Dead City, up to when he had been released, that morning—explained everything except that Bug-juice Bob had been a party to his adventures, and that part relative to his discovery that Shasta Kate was none other than Calamity Jane.

"Then, it is your opinion that this man Bingham, *alias* Colonel Choker, is really my rascally brother-in-law, Rex Ravel?" Ferret Fan asked.

"I do think so."

"And you also think he has got little Rex with him, in this secret retreat?"

"Very likely. The woman, Shasta Kate, was no doubt hired to take care of the boy."

The girl was silent a moment, in thought.

"You intend to try and find the boy, I suppose?" she finally said.

"I do, most assuredly."

"Then, in case you recover him, I suppose you will turn him over to my care?"

"I should deem it necessary to consider, somewhat, before deciding on that question."

"Oh! of course. But, I, you see, would be the nearest and most natural person to take charge of him."

"Perhaps. It will be time enough to discuss that matter, when we get the boy."

"Of course I see no reason why we three might not as well combine forces and work together."

"That plan would hardly be agreeable. You have your friend here, to assist you, while I always prefer to work alone. Then, too, I do not care to endanger my life too much!"

"How do you mean?"

"I mean that I am Deadwood Dick, the person whom you have sworn to kill for no cause whatever, more than that your husband was mistaken for me—I was miles from the place at the time—and hung, by the Vigilantes!"

Dick uttered the words coolly, a half-amused expression upon his face.

"You Deadwood Dick?" Ferret Fan gasped, her face growing pale, and a gleam of sudden-wrought passion entering her eyes—"you Deadwood Dick?"

"That same embodiment of flesh, bones and notoriety!" was the prompt answer.

"Then, you spoke the truth when you said it would not be agreeable to work in concert. Through your unenviable notoriety I lost my husband, and I'll not go back on the oath I took over his grave!"

She spoke with the fierceness of undying hatred, and drew a revolver from her belt, evidently fully intending to use it, but Haines grasped her wrist, firmly.

"None of that, Flora!" he said, authoritatively.

"Your grudge against this man is both unreasonable and unwarranted, no matter what his reputation may be, or has been. He had nothing to do with your husband's death, and you shall attempt no rash act when I am about. Would you shoot a man who is unarmed?"

"As quick as I'd crush a fly! However, I'll not shock your nerves by taking my revenge, now. We will return to the camp. As for you, sir,"—and she turned a burning glance upon the impressive Dick—"my vengeance will reach you yet. I swear it!"

She turned, then, and walked toward the camp, Harold Haines slowly following her.

CHAPTER XI.

BUG-JUICE BOB ON A RACKET.

BUG-JUICE BOB had, to some extent, shown himself to be a "character," and though at first Dick had been suspicious of him, these suspicions had passed away, and the wary ex-road-agent came to the conclusion that Bob was on the square, so far as loyalty was concerned.

But all the peculiarities of the mountain tramp and happy-go-lucky vagabond had not as yet had an airing, as we shall see.

After leaving Deadwood Dick, Bug-juice Bob hastened toward the camp and into the first place where his favorite beverage was dispensed, which happened to be the Big Nugget, it being open earlier than any of the other saloons.

Entering the saloon, Bob paused, felt of the crisp ten-dollar note in his pocket, and looked wistfully at the bar, where a number of persons were taking their morning "breakfast coxer."

"Only a saw-buck," Bob mused, reflectively.

"I wonder if it will buy enuff pizen ter git up er sensation in me stummick? It's doubtful. It takes a soakin' rain ter make a drouth feel moist, an' ther same applies ter me, an' whispers in me equitable ear: 'Don't go ter shootin' off yer boodle too suddintly, Robby, fer ye may need several cart-wheels ter brace ye up when ther sun goes down.' An' thet's a true fact. I must let some good Samaritan do ther treatin', ter start with."

If he had presented a forlorn appearance when he first encountered Deadwood Dick, he looked incomparably worse now, and wore the air of a man who had passed through a severe winter without food, fire or water.

His entrance caused those who were gathered at the bar to look around, and their faces assumed an expression of commiseration.

"Hello, my man!" a well-dressed member of the party cried out. "Come this way. What are you—what do you call yourself? Are you alive?"

"No, I'm dead—dead—dead!" Bug-juice announced, in a tone of deep solemnity.

"Dead broke, I presume," was the retort.

"Where'd you come from, anyhow?"

"From the grave, noble sir—from the grave! I am ther 'riginal Rip Van Winkle, an' I hev jest awoken from a sleep uv thirty years, an' I'm werry dry!"

"Ha! ha! pretty good! So you are dry, are you?"

"Dryer then ther desert uv Sarah, noble sir! Oh, look not on me wi' scorn because I am ragged! Once I wore raiment even more costly than thine, sir, and proudly did I tread the boards 'mid ringing plaudits!"

"The boards?"

"Ay! ther stage. I am an actor, sir—or I uster be afore the troupe went up the flume an' left me in the relentless clutches of advarsity. It was since then thet I became the walking scare-crow you now behold, noble sir!"

"He's a regular professional vagabond, Bentley!" the bartender said, addressing the man who had opened the conversation.

"Oh, I presume so," was the careless reply.

"No, I ain't no vagabond!" blustered Bug-juice. "I don't pan out well fer looks now, but ye kin bet I uster 'draw' when I war on ther stage."

"What did you do on the stage?" Bentley asked.

"Everything, sir. I've filled every persition from supe ter manager, an' played every part from Hamlet ter an organ-grinder's monkey. Then, too, I've bin in ther speshilty biz as a juggler. Great fang-tooth fakes! Yer jest orter see me juggle! Ef I wasn't so nigh broke up fer a drink o' suthin' stimulat'ing, I'd give yer an exhibition of my skill."

"You go on and prove that you're what you have represented, and you shall have what you want to drink!" Bentley encouraged.

"By the sandals uv ther original Shylock, it's a bargain!" Bug-juice responded, brightening up. "But hold! Where are my tools? Ah! I hev et, whar ther leader had the fiddle! Ye see them long-necked bottles, yonder, behind the bar?"

"I see them."

"Well, sir, ter prove ter you that I am an artist in advarsity, I will juggle seven o' them bottles in the air, one on top of the other, holdin' ther bottom bottle in my mouth, an' makin' ther top one dance a jig—thet is, ef any galoot's mornin'-bracer hes taken effect so he kin whistle me an *aria*!"

"Bosh! nonsense! You'r a humbug! You can't do nothing of the sort!" Bentley protested.

"But allow me, noble sir, to insinuate thet I

can. Alas! my last shekel has departed my purse, or I'd gamble on it!"

"Would you? Now, see here; it strikes me you are about the mouthiest fraud I ever met. If you can do the act you'd not be here."

"Set out ther bottles, Sir Bartender, and allow me to fill this scoffer's boots chock-full o' conviction!" cried Bug-juice, waving his arms dramatically.

"Nix-ee bottles!" the dispenser of "lightning" declared, grimly. "Them bottles are full o' ther best whisky!"

"Let him have seven of the bottles," Bentley ordered. "I'll pay for breakage."

"All right, sir. You're don' it—not me!" And the bartender looked his disgust, as he placed the bottles on the bar.

"And as for you, sir," Bentley said, addressing the bummer, "if you successfully perform the feat you have claimed to be able to do, the seven bottles of liquor belong to you, at my expense."

"To me—all to me!" and Bob's fingers worked convulsively.

"Yes. You can take 'em, go out and lay down under some bush, and soak yourself in whisky till you are dissolved, for all I care."

"What! Them few gulps dissolve me? Nary time, my royal sir. Ef ye wanter see me real b'ilin', funny drunk—wanter see all ther wit an' comedy in me nature brought out ter ther surface, you'll hev ter roll out a bar!"

The tramp then took one of the bottles, turned it over and over, and weighed it in his hand—then the cork shot suddenly ceilingward, the bottle was seen raised to his lips and the contents heard to go gurgling down his throat.

He only took a good swig, however, after which he recovered the cork and returned it to the bottle.

Then kissing his hand to the crowd, he held the bottle by the neck and upside down in his left hand, by way of beginning his performance. He next placed the second bottle on top of the first and followed with the third, fourth and fifth, balancing them with the greatest apparent ease.

The pyramid was now higher than he could reach, but after steadying himself, he tossed the sixth bottle into the air, and it came down in its proper place on top of the other bottles without knocking any of them out of place.

A murmur of astonishment escaped the spectators. This was something too scientific or skillful for their understanding.

With a triumphant smile, Bug-juice Bob seized the seventh bottle, and steadying the wavering pyramid in his right hand, thrust his left hand behind his back, and by a little jerk sent the last bottle spinning up over his right shoulder toward the top of the pyramid, where it landed, the crowning triumph of the wonderful act, in safety!

It was certainly all a marvel of nerve and a juggler's precision.

And early as was the hour, the Big Nugget bar-room rung wildly with uproarious cheers.

But Bug-juice was not done.

He waved his hand to enjoin silence, and then pointed up toward the pinnacle of the pyramid.

To the astonishment of the crowd, the top bottle began to jump up and down, and weave from one side to the other, like a drunken thing.

Then it jumped off into Bob's left grasp, and the others followed suit, until they were all on the floor.

"Bravo! bravo! The whisky is yours, my man!" Bentley cried, enthusiastically, "and besides that, you must come up and have a drink with me!"

"And I'll give you a hundred dollars a week to perform that act here once each evening!" declared the boss of the Big Nugget, seeing big profits at the bar through having such a card on exhibition.

"Nary a hundred!" Bug-juice replied. "I hev foresworn the stage forever. Here's yer health, Bentley, old stockin's!"

He tossed off the drink, then gathered up the bottles in his arms and said:

"Tra-la-leel gents, I'll be back when I've fed me snakes. By-by!" and he left the hotel.

Bentley and several of the crowd followed, but when they got out of doors, Bug-juice Bob had vanished from view as completely as if an earthquake had swallowed him.

Nor was his battle-scarred visage seen again until evening.

It was then perceptible, as he entered the Big Nugget, that he had been indulging considerably, for his walk was unsteady, and his face flushed.

Had he swallowed the contents of the whole seven bottles?

If so, it had not "dissolved" him by any means, nor had the liquor satisfied his appetite, for he made straight for the bar, put out the cash for "four fingers" of the "bug," and gulped down the fiery stuff, smacking his lips as if it were a draught of elixir.

He then took from his pocket a sort of fife, which, though rude, and of his own recent manufacture looked as if it might be musical.

And so it proved.

Placing the instrument to his lips, he began to waltz about the bar-room, in a manner most graceful, and in perfect time with the weirdly beautiful waltz music he played.

In silence, and with rapt attention, the crowd listened, for here, surely, was a refreshing novelty, and one that they appreciated.

After continuing his antics for some ten minutes, Bug-juice took off his hat and proceeded to pass it around.

Did he get any contributions?

Of course he did!

Scarcely a man in the crowd, was there, who did not put in a nickel or quarter, and by the time he had gone the rounds, Bob's sorry specimen of a hat was heavy with coin.

Bug-juice stowed the collection away in his pockets, with an expression of urbanity wonderful to see upon such a face as his, and then, suddenly, espied a man whom he had not appealed to for a contribution—a well-built, well-dressed person, with a luxuriant flowing black beard and mustache, who was seated alone, at a table, in an obscure corner of the room.

Bug-juice was on the make, and he no sooner saw the man than he arose, and swaggered toward him.

"Hillo! pard!" he saluted, with a hiccup, and a leer. "Reckon I didn't reach you, w'en I war tookin' up ther kerlection!"

"It's just as well. You'd have got nothing if you had!" was the gruff answer, and the black-bearded individual did not look as if he were in an overly pleasant state of mind.

"I wouldn't, eh?" and Bob braced himself by spreading his feet wide apart, and putting his arms akimbo. "So yer ain't on ther give, hey, boss?"

"Decidedly not!" was the reply. "I don't care to fraternize with tramps, so about the safest thing you can do is to keep at a distance."

"Hillo! You don't tell me! Why yure bad, aire you?"

"You'll find out how bad I am if you don't mind your own business and move on!" the man said, savagely.

If his words implied a threat Bug-juice Bob was entirely too good-natured from the effects of booze to take any note of the fact. He merely stared harder at the man with the raven hirsute appendage, and uttered a prolonged whistle.

"Waal, I'll be cussed! Yer kinder talks es tho' ye run this hyer caboose!" he finally retorted. "Guess mebbe ye don't know me?"

"No, and don't want to. Are you going to move on?" and a polished "six" peeped over the top of the table.

"Great fang-toothed fumes o' fun! That settles it!" Bug-juice exclaimed. "You kin have the jack-pot, pardner—I'm out of the game!" and, good as his word, Bug-juice made himself scarce about that particular portion of the great apartment.

It was not because he was so particularly frightened, however. There was a peculiar twinkle in his blood-shot eyes, which bespoke triumph.

"Reckon I hev struck ther blow-end uv a bonanza!" he chuckled. "Ef them whiskers aire the bona fide article, I'm a durn web-futted lizzard. We'll see, in ther sweet by an' by—we will!"

Bob took another "stimulant" at the bar, and then threw himself into a chair by the wall, near the faro-table, and to all appearances went to sleep.

But he was not asleep by any means, and by peering between his heavy eye-lashes he kept well informed as to the movements of pretty nearly every one in the room, and knew what was going on.

As he anticipated, it was not long ere the man with the black whiskers came and sat down at the faro-table, and invested in chips.

The game was running large, and the new devotee lost, twice in succession.

Each time he uttered a curse at his ill luck, but made no move to stop playing.

Three times he lost, and tried it again.

"If I don't do something for myself now, I'm out of the game!" he said, grimly. "Here's my last money."

The other players made no reply.

If they were sorry for anything, it was that the man did not have a bigger pile of money to lose.

The game was played, and the bank "hailed the heap!"

While he of the black whiskers arose.

"My money's all gone!" he declared.

"An' so's yer whiskers!" cried a rough voice, and, at the same time, a hand seized hold of the sweeping false beard and jerked it from the man's face.

Colonel Choker—for it was he—uttered a cry of consternation and rage, as he saw Bug-juice Bob darting from the bar-room, waving the chin-scalp victoriously in the air.

But Bob had vanished, ere Choker could make any move to stop him.

CHAPTER XII.

FERRET FAN'S RESOLVE.

WHEN Ferret Fan and Harold Haines returned to the mining-camp, after their encounter with Deadwood Dick, they did not speak a word.

Fan's face was stern and angered of expression, and it was evident that she chafed under the fact that Haines had in a measure restrained her from carrying out her vengeful purpose.

When they reached the hotel, she announced her intention of retiring to her room, and Haines saw no more of her until toward night, when she came down into the bar-room.

Procuring a drink at the bar, she left the hotel, beckoning Haines to follow.

He did so, and they met just at the edge of the camp where the bulletin board had stood, the day of Deadwood Dick's arrival.

Here, in the shadow of the only tenantless cabin in Dead City, the two faced each other.

Fan's face was not frank and calm of expression, but still wore a sullen look, and her eyes emitted a peculiar gleam.

"I suppose you wonder what I want of you?" she said, coming to the point at once.

"Oh! not particularly!" Haines replied. "I presumed you had something to say to me."

"And so I have. I wish to ask you a pointed question."

"Well, what is it?"

"Will you give me a candid answer?"

"I will try to do so."

"Very well. How would you like to make ten thousand dollars?"

Haines gave her a quick, inquiring glance.

"I don't know that I should be particularly averse to it, so long as I get it honestly."

"Winners cannot always be choosers!" was the dry retort. "Answer me one question more: In event of Rex Ravel's death, who do you think is most entitled to the fortune my father left behind—my sister's son or myself?"

"I don't know that I could give an honest answer to that question without some deliberation. As your father's will wholly ignored you, I presume the majority of the people would decide in favor of your sister's son."

"Perhaps they would. But it was not right that papa should disinherit me when Lelia made even a worse match than I?"

"Maybe not. That does not affect the case, in a legal sense, however!"

"I am aware of that. How do you suppose Jonathan Jester thinks? If I were to argue to him that the fortune was more mine than the child's, do you suppose it would have any effect on him?"

Haines laughed.

"Not the least," he replied. "Jester is a man of great avoirdupois, and as firm in resolve as he is considerable in weight!"

"Then you take it for granted that, in case he does not settle the money on the father, he will do so on the son?"

"Of course."

"And also assume the guardianship of the boy?"

"Not at all improbable."

Ferret Fan was silent a moment, her burning gaze fixed upon the ground.

"Well! I've made up my mind to one thing!" she said, at length. "The boy is in his father's care, according to Deadwood Dick's tell, and will likely fare well. He is the very image of his father, and as I detest his father, it is not likely that I should ever like the son. Therefore, let him remain where he is. The fortune is lawfully mine, and I propose to have it!"

"Indeed!"

"Exactly. I am not talking idly. I mean just what I say. I have fully made up my mind that the fortune rightfully belongs to me, and I mean to possess it."

"How?"

"By fair means, if possible. If not, otherwise."

"I am astonished, Miss Harrison!"
 "Are you? You needn't be, for you must assist me."
 "You are wrong, for I could never take a hand in any scheme that would defraud a motherless child."

"Bah! Nonsense! There is no defrauding about it. Let Ravel look out for the boy, himself. He is amply able to do it, with the money he robbed my father of. The fortune is mine, I tell you. I shall first make a formal demand on Jester, for it. If he refuses to recognize my claim, we'll steal it!"

Haines looked astounded, and shook his head.
 "No! no! I can never take part in your scheme," he declared, with decision.

"But you can—you must! If you refuse, you will afterward regret it. As soon as I get possession of the money, I will pay you ten thousand dollars. After that, the chance will be open to you to become owner of half the remaining thirty, should you be of a matrimonial turn of mind."

Haines looked thoughtful.
 Ten thousand dollars!
 It was a big sum, in his eyes—larger than he had dreamed of soon possessing. Then, too, as Flora had broadly hinted, his chances for possessing her and half her thirty thousand, were assured.

But, could he squeeze his conscience enough to allow him to enter into a scheme that would defraud little Rex Ravel of his natural rights?

It was this accusing question which he was turning over in his mind, and endeavoring to answer.

"Come! It's as fair as fair can be!" Ferret Fan said, persuasively. "There's no real crime attached to the matter. If there was I would not ask your assistance, but would go it alone. I don't know how much money you have got, but I reckon I'm safe in concluding you are far from rich. You assisted me once, and now, I offer you a reward. However, do as you like. If you prefer poverty to luxury, all right. I'll not urge you a bit."

"If you steal, you know the consequences, if you are caught."

"Pooh! Once we get the money we'll not tarry long in this burg!"

"When will you tackle Jester?"

"At once!"

"And if he refuses to give up the money?"

"We will go through him when he's asleep."

"Very good. As you have suggested, ten thousand dollars is too nice a sum to let slip by. So you can count me in."

"I thought you'd come to your senses. I am not a scheming nor a bad-meaning girl, but I am satisfied the money is as much mine as any one else's, and I mean to have it."

"Then, if you get your money, you will forego your contemplated vengeance on Rex Ravel and Deadwood Dick?"

"By no means. In disguise I shall lay for them, and shoot them down!"

Shortly after the foregoing conversation took place, a man's peculiar actions, in the rear of the Big Nugget Hotel, might have attracted attention, had there been any one in that immediate vicinity to notice them.

He was an individual under medium height, but rather thick-set. His garments were coarse and mud-splashed, his boots big and coarse, his hat slouchy and pulled down to his eyes.

His face was also bewhiskered to the eyes, and he was a most sinister-looking chap.

He was skulking about the rear of the hotel, and evidently making an optical inventory of its doors and windows, of which there were several.

He finally selected one, and eyed it more minutely than the rest. It was located midway between the two ends of the building in the second story.

The sash of the window was raised.

The skulker looked sharply about him to see if he was observed, and then took a ladder, which lay on the ground beside the hotel, and raising it, placed it against the ledge of the window casement.

He lightly ascended, and took a look into the space beyond the window.

Whatever he saw did not seem to frighten him off, for, after a moment's survey of the interior he clambered through the opening, and disappeared.

Some ten minutes elapsed ere he made his reappearance and descended to the ground, his movements as soft and catlike as before.

He removed the ladder, and restored it to its position as he had found it.

Then he skulked swiftly away.

What had been his mission within the hotel?

No one had seen him enter—no one had seen him depart.

But, whatever had been his mission, it had evidently been successful, for he chuckled in triumph as he hurried away.

CHAPTER XIII.

THE DEMAND.

DESPITE the fact that he had retired at mid-afternoon, to take his nap, that ponderous piece of human corporosity, Jonathan Jester, did not awaken until after dark.

He hastily arose, and glanced at his watch, and was astonished to find that it was after nine o'clock. After lighting the candle on the stand, he sat down and passed his hand over his expansive forehead, which was covered with perspiration.

"Heavens! what a dream!" he gasped, glancing nervously at the open window of his room, which looked out at the rear of the hotel. "I thought burglars were in the room, robbing me of the money. Drat the infernal fortune—I'll be glad when I get rid of it, for a man with so much money in his possession is liable to be murdered in his bed."

He looked under that last mentioned piece of furniture, and then went and peered out of the window.

"I guess I am safe enough, so far as the window is concerned, but the door is a flimsy affair. Perhaps however, I am nervous, without cause. No one knows I am here with so much money, except Haines, and possibly Ravel, himself. He would not be apt to try to get possession of it, without first making a demand for it. As for Haines, he always seemed to be an honest sort of fellow. There's no telling what a man will do. Forty thousand dollars, in clean cash, is a big sum, and would be apt to tempt the average man, sorely, if he thought he could safely get away with it."

There was plenty of reason in the idea, and Jester was thoughtful for several minutes.

"Yes, it's a big sum," he mused on, "and the more I think about it, the more I am impressed with the idea that it ain't safe in this hotel. Harold Haines might be tempted to turn traitor, and, in such an event, he could easily overpower and rob me, as I dare say he could get plenty of fellows, in this rough place, to help him. I've a mind to take the money, and secrete it."

He picked up his traveling bag, and unlocking it, took therefrom, a package, done up in brown paper, and looking as if it might contain money, it being of the length and width of a bank note.

"There's forty one-thousand-dollar bills in this!" he muttered—"a snug fortune. But it don't belong to me, and yet it is my duty to look to its safety. I doubt not I can find a safer place for it, than in this room."

He thrust it in one of his pockets, and, after making his toilet, went down-stairs.

There was no way of egress from the hotel, without first entering the great bar-room.

And it so happened that, as Jester entered, the "scene" at the faro table was just taking place, wherein Bug-juice Bob became the victor by possessing himself of the false black beard, and escaping from the room.

After swearing at a fearful rate, for full two minutes, the undisguised man gave chase, and was no more seen in the Big Nugget. He was in fact none other than Bingham, alias Colonel Choker.

To Jonathan Jester, however, he was a man of an entirely different name.

"By my soul! That was Rex Ravel!" the fat fortune-holder mused, "and he was here, in disguise, no doubt to see me. I wonder who in the world that could have been, who unmasked him? He must have enemies on his trail."

It now required several minutes of deliberation, on Jester's part, to enable him to decide how to act. Should he retain possession of the fortune, about his person, until Ravel reappeared?

He argued not; it might not be advisable.

In fact, it was his intention to try and influence Ravel to allow him to retain part of the money, and put it to the credit of little Rex.

So he decided to secrete the fortune somewhere in the gulch, where it would not be apt to be discovered, and then he could feel safer in attempting to make his own terms with Ravel.

Wandering about the saloon for awhile, he finally slipped out of doors, as he thought, unnoticed, and was soon in a dark part of the gulch.

There was no moon in the heavens, and what stars were there, cast but a dim light.

When he was off the street, and beyond where there were any habitations, Jester took the precaution to pause and listen.

He heard nothing to indicate that he was followed, however, and went on and soon reached the edge of the mountain, which surrounded the "pocket."

After a short search, he found a dry niche, or crevice, partly hidden by creeping vines, just large enough to hold the package.

So therein he deposited it, and after viewing his surroundings a moment, and satisfying himself that he had not been followed, he returned toward the Big Nugget.

The money's safe, now, at any rate," he congratulated himself. "There's no telling what a few hours may bring forth, and therefore, I shall be in no particular hurry to give up the prize. I feel that it ought to go to Lelia's heir. And, if Rex Ravel has an enemy here, as I should infer, by what I saw, to-night, there's no telling but what there may be a shooting or knifing affair, if I await long enough, in

which Ravel will get his everlasting ticket-of-leave from this earth. Gods! it would be a mercy if the rascal would get murdered!"

And Jonathan Jester went back to the Big Nugget, easier of mind, because he believed the fortune was hidden where no one would find it.

He had been in the busy bar-room of the hostelry but a few minutes, seated at a table with a bottle of wine, and cigars, before him, when he was approached by Ferret Fan.

The girl was looking her prettiest, and as fat Jonathan had a great eye for feminine beauty, he regarded her with curiosity, not unmixed with admiration.

"You are Mr. Jester, I believe?" Fan said, pausing by the table, and resting one hand upon it.

"That's my name, when I speak seriously, and without jesting!" Jonathan replied, with one of his blandest smiles. "You, I believe—"

"I am Flora Harrison—otherwise Argyle. Here, however, I am known as Ferret Fan."

"Ah! yes. I am very glad to meet you."

"And I am equally glad to meet you, sir. Mr. Haines has informed me that you hold the fortune my father left behind, and I am here to see you about it."

"Yes! Well, what can I do for you—will you be seated?"—and he placed a chair for her, at the table.

She sat down, and looked Mr. Jester over, as if his immense proportions were something of a curiosity to her.

"Yes, I want to see you about the fortune," she said, at length. "I understand that in his will, my father disinherited me?"

"Well, yes, or at least, pretty nearly. To make the will legal, he left you one dollar. As I am authorized to do so, I will pay you now!" and with a half-amused twinkle in his eyes, Jester laid a silver dollar on the table.

"Thank you for nothing!" Fan said, with a shrug of her shoulders. "You can return that to your pocket. I do not take inheritances in as small chunks as that. I want the whole or none."

"Ah! you do?"

"Most assuredly. In fact, to be plain with you, I want the forty thousand dollars you have brought here to Dead City."

"Indeed!" and Jester looked around uneasily, lest some one should have overheard her. "Why, you surprise me, Miss Harrison."

"Do I? Well, I don't see why. Am I not a daughter of my father? Was it right to cut me off, without recognition? My sister is dead, and I am the most natural heir to the fortune."

"Your sister died?"

"Yes. She was murdered, in the mountains, by Rex Ravel or some of his allies, and her boy stolen!"

"I had not heard of that!"

"Probably not. I only heard of it to-day!"

"Who was your informant?"

"Deadwood Dick!"

"What?"

"Deadwood Dick, I said."

"The fellow who stopped the stage, when we were en route for Redville?"

"Yes, if that was Deadwood Dick, as the driver claimed."

"Where did you see him?"

"I encountered him, in the pocket, to-day. He informed me that he attended my sister's death-bed, about three weeks ago, and she exacted a promise from him that he would get possession of little Rex, and the fortune also, and put it out to the boy's credit."

"Indeed! And he is here, in search of the boy?"

"So he says. But bah! Once he gets possession of the money he'll not bother himself to hunt up little Rex."

"He hasn't got the fortune yet—nor has anybody else!" Jonathan announced, with considerable emphasis.

"I am glad to hear that. The fortune rightfully belongs to me."

"I presume not," Jester said. "I as holder of the legacy, am authorized to pay it to Rex Ravel, senior. In case of his death, by the terms of the will, little Rex will be the heir."

Ferret Fan's face flushed dark with anger.

"Then you refuse to countenance my claim altogether?" she demanded.

"I don't see how I am to do even that, for you have no actual claim to countenance or discountenance."

"Pshaw! You are provoking. If you were in my place, don't you suppose you would want what was rightfully yours?"

"If so, and I had been disinherited, I should consider my chances worthless."

"But I don't!" Fan declared, firmly. "Lelia's boy has not half the right to that fortune that I have. Do you refuse to give it to me?"

"Most assuredly, my dear Miss Harrison, and excuse me if I say you are very foolish to expect such a thing."

"Thank you for nothing, again. And at the same time, allow me to inform you that I do not intend to be cheated out of my rights. Rex Ravel, senior, nor Rex Ravel, junior, shall ever have one penny of that fortune, mark my word!"

Jonathan Jester smiled, good-naturedly, as she arose.

"Well, don't get in a passion about the matter, my dear!" he said, benignantly. "I shall without doubt have the pleasure of getting rid of the troublesome fortune very soon. While it would afford me the greatest pleasure to recognize a claim, on your part, I am sorry to say I cannot conscientiously do so, and therefore, I would advise you to make light of

your disappointment. Wealth is but a mockery, at best."

"Scarcely more of a mockery than your words are!" she retorted. "Remember, I am but a woman, but I've got plenty of game in me, and when that forty thousand is carried out of this camp, it will be I who carries it!"

"Oh, well, all right! When you get it, my impetuous Miss Flora, call around and let me know!" And Jonathan silently laughed until his fat sides shook.

While Ferret Fan walked away, her rage knowing no bounds.

"Won't I get it?" she hissed—"won't I? Well, we shall see! It will be strange, indeed, if I allow it to slip away once I lay hands upon it—and that will be this very night. Haines is solid, I guess, and I don't anticipate that we shall have much difficulty in capturing the prize."

Perhaps she calculated, while thus reasoning, that Mr. Jonathan Jester was altogether a sleepy man; but it happened that Jonathan had taken a nap that afternoon!

CHAPTER XIV.

DEADWOOD DICK ON TRACK.

THE unbewhiskered Colonel Choker, *alias* Rexford Ravel, did not pursue Bug-juice Bob far beyond the entrance to the Big Nugget Hotel, for the simple and yet potent reason that when the colonel got out into the open air, the Bug-juice was nowhere to be seen.

"Ten thousand furies!" the colonel muttered. "I wonder who the cursed fellow was? Some one that knows me, it must be. I wonder what effect my unmasking had on the people inside?"

He dared not re-enter, for he was aware that Harold Haines, Flora Harrison and Jonathan Jester, all three, were somewhere about the hotel and would recognize him.

Whether any of them had been in the bar room to witness the scene just occurred, he did not know.

He skulked around to the rear of the hotel, and peered through one of the windows into the bar-room.

There did not appear to be much excitement going on, but he saw something that caused a gleam to enter his eyes.

"There's Jonathan Jester!" he muttered. "He has come with my forty thousand dollars. Hal! hal! See how sharply he looks at everybody. He expects to see me. I wonder where my trusty lawyer, Spriggins, is? Maybe he concluded to remain in California!"

He kept his eye on Jester's movements eagerly.

"The cuss don't seem much concerned with having so much money about him. I wonder how I shall contrive to get the boodle without facing him—which I do not care to do. Spriggins wrote me to look out for him, as, being a private detective, he might have a warrant for my arrest on the charge of desertion. It would spoil all to get into the clutches of the law now."

He uttered the last word with considerable emphasis, and shivered slightly, as if some unwelcome memory had forced itself back on him.

Finally he saw Jester come toward the window—then turn back, and leave the hotel by the front door.

"I wonder where he is going? It's my business to follow him and see!"

He was soon on Jester's track, and followed as cautiously as a sleuth.

"Hal! he goes out into the pocket toward the mountain-side. I wonder what for? To bury the money? Lucky thought! That's his very errand. He fears that some one may steal it from him at the hotel. Hal! hal! It's mine now for sure, and no trouble to get it, either!"

He dogged Jester like a shadow.

He saw him search among the rocks, and marked well the spot where the package was secreted.

Then he slunk back, and remained in hiding until Jester started back for the hotel, and was well on his way. Then the scamp approached the *cache*, and found it without difficulty.

A chuckle of triumph escaped him as he drew out the package.

"Hal! the fortune is mine now in earnest!" he cried, exultantly. "I've got it, and that's all I've been figuring for these several years. With my boy I'll now go East, and spend the remainder of my days in luxury. The gold mine can go to thunder—or, better yet, the Vultures can work it, and send me a percentage. Undoubtedly they would do so!" and he laughed sarcastically at the idea. "My fair sister-in-law, who is no doubt in Dead City hoping to get a slice out of this boodle, will get beautifully left!"

He laughed again, triumphantly.

After storing the package away about his person, he took his departure, chuckling every now and then at the thought of how easily he had secured the fortune, when Jonathan Jester thought he had hidden it most securely.

The villain did not go back into the mining-camp, but skirted around it, and made for the other end of the pocket.

Like a shadow, a dark figure followed him, but so cautiously and catlike that Ravel had no suspicion of pursuit.

The shadower was Deadwood Dick.

Himself on a reconnaissance, he had witnessed the bar-room episode, and had surmised Rex Ravel's purposes.

"Ravel will return at once to his rendezvous, and hasten his departure from this vicinity," Dick concluded. "I'd relieve him of the money now only that I must get possession of the boy. The scoundrel is not fit to have the bringing up of an innocent

child, and, besides, my promise to the mother must be fulfilled."

So Dick hesitated not to follow.

At times he was close behind Ravel, but the villain was too engrossed in gloating over the prize he had captured to think of enemies.

When he reached the further end of the pocket, however, he paused, and gazed searchingly about him.

Deadwood Dick was flat on his face in an instant, and thus escaped detection.

After satisfying himself that no one had followed he entered a clump of bushes that grew close against the mountain wall.

Before him was a natural fissure in this wall, wide enough and high enough to admit two men abreast.

It was probably but a natural crevice originally, but human hands had enlarged it to its present proportions.

Pausing in this entrance, Ravel fumbled about, found a lantern and lit it.

He then hurried on into the recesses.

The passage was long and winding and grew steeper the further it penetrated into the bowels of the mountain.

He continued on his way, and soon reached a level transverse hall, which he followed a short distance, and then turned through an arched entrance, pushed aside a mass of curtains, and found himself in the apartment, where he had the interview with Deadwood Dick.

There was no one in the room, however, at which he seized a bell, and rung it violently.

After a short delay, Shasta Kate made her appearance.

"Did you want me?" she calmly inquired.

"Want you? Of course I want you! Where is Rex?"

"Asleep!"

"Then go prepare him, and yourself, for a journey. We leave Dead City and vicinity to-night, forever! You and Rex accompany me."

"You speak before you are sure. I have no intention whatever of accompanying you."

"But you must. I could not get along without you on account of the child."

"It matters not. When you leave here, I am through with you!"

The man evidently was annoyed at this rebellion but answered by taking the package of money from his pocket, and tapping it significantly.

"You see that?" he said.

"Yes, I'm not blind."

"Well, that package contains forty thousand dollars, all in clean cash. Go with me, marry me, and be a mother to my child, and half of it is yours."

"Bah! I would not go with you, nor marry you, Rex Ravel, if you were to give me ten times the whole amount!"

"Rex Ravel!" he echoed, aghast. "How do you happen to know my name?"

"It matters not. I know a great deal more about you than you think. And I doubt very much if you have got the amount you claim."

"Do you? Well, to satisfy you, I'll give you convincing proof!"

He tore off the wrapper triumphantly, but a furious cry escaped him.

Instead of a stack of bank-notes, his gaze rested upon a number of strips of newspaper, cut up into bank-note size, and neatly piled up, one on top of another.

"Ten thousand devils!" he gasped. "I have been cheated!"

"As you deserved to be," the woman retorted.

"Curse you! you gloat in my defeat, do you?"

She only laughed sarcastically.

He eyed her a moment with his burning gaze. His rage was awful.

"I believe you had a hand in this, you she-devil," he hissed, and with a quick move, he seized a club, or heavy cane, standing near at hand, and rushed upon her.

She threw up her hands to ward off the blow, but the cane came down with stunning force, and with a cry, she fell back insensible, a stream of blood spurting from the wound the club had inflicted on her head.

Without a second glance at her, Ravel dropped the cane, and rushed from the room.

"Curses upon Jester!" he cried, hoarsely. "You have fooled me, but it shall cost you your life. And I'll have the fortune if I have to overturn heaven and earth!"

CHAPTER XV.

FAN SHOWS HER TEETH.

AFTER her unsatisfactory interview with Jonathan Jester, Ferret Fan retired to her room in the hotel, and did not make her appearance again until midnight.

The crowd in the bar-room had largely thinned out by that time. Harold Haines was there, however, and the girl approached him and drew him one side.

"Everything works well!" she said. "I have been reconnoitering, and find that Jester has retired to his room. I listened at the door, and his heavy breathing indicates that he is asleep. Our time for action is near at hand."

Haines regarded her steadily for a moment before making any reply.

"Miss Flora!" he said, finally, "I've made up my mind not to become a partner to this proposed robbery."

"What!" she gasped. "Will you go back on your word, at this stage of the game?"

"No—for I gave no binding promise that I would assist you. I have thought the matter all over, and my resolve is fixed!"

"You are a fool!"

"I don't think so. I have always been a man who valued honor and integrity. I have also endeavored to lead a sinless life, and I do not care to commence sinning now. So, I will have nothing to do with your scheme!"

"Very well!" and Ferret Fan's eyes flashed viciously. "See that you don't repent your piety when it is too late. Mind one thing, however!"

"What is it?" he demanded.

"If you attempt to interfere with my schemes, you will never get out of Dead City alive!"

"I shall not bother myself in the least. What you do, does not matter to me so long as I have no hand in it!"

"See that it is so!" she said, and turned away and left the saloon.

Fan had not set her mind upon possessing the fortune, without forming her plans, for, on leaving the bar-room, she made her way around to the rear of the building.

Here all was dark and gloomy, except that from Jonathan Jester's window a light shone.

She made a careful search of the neighborhood, before attempting to enter Jester's room, as was her design.

She at length became satisfied that she was the only one in the neighborhood.

Her next move was to raise the ladder and rest it against the window-sill of Jester's room. To do this without making any noise, was no easy matter, but she finally succeeded cleverly enough, and then mounted the ladder until her head was above the window ledge.

Then, she paused and looked into the room.

The window-sash was still raised, as it had been during the afternoon.

Upon the bed lay the rotund Jonathan. He was lying upon his back, and Ferret Fan could not see his face, but concluded by his heavy breathing that he was asleep.

Tucked away, in under the bed, she also spied his traveling bag.

"He keeps the money in that, without doubt!" she mused, "for he could not well carry forty thousand dollars in his pockets. If I can get possession of the satchel, without awaking him, I'll be all right."

After a short pause she crawled stealthily through the open casement into the room. To do so her back was partly turned toward the bed.

When safely in the room, she turned—a cry of consternation burst from her lips.

Sitting up on the bed, and gazing at her was Jonathan Jester. In either hand he clutched a revolver, the muzzles of which looked straight at the young woman.

"Hal! hal! so I have caught you, have I?" he cried. "Failing to get the fortune for the asking, you thought to rob me of it, did you?"

She gazed at him a moment, speechless with rage and chagrin.

"Yes, I came here to rob you—ay! murder you, if necessary—anything, so I got possession of the money, which is lawfully mine."

"If that is your purpose I had better kill you here and now!" and he looked as if he had made up his mind to kill her.

"If you harm me you will hang for it that is sure; so I will bid you good-night to save you from being hanged."

"Stop! don't you dare to leave this room, until I order you to do so!" Jester cried, sternly. "If you do, I'll put a bullet through you. Are you not ashamed of this attempted robbery?"

"Not in the least!"

"I'm astonished—shocked beyond expression."

"You're welcome to be. I'm sure I have no objections!"

"Flora! for heaven's sake be sensible."

"Bah! I want the fortune!"

"It's not yours. You cannot have it!"

"Can't I? But I will! Nothing shall stop me—do you hear—nothing! I will remove all obstacles by fair means or foul. Can I go?"

"Not until I have had my say. It is with deep regret that I have found you to be so unnatural, and untrustworthy. But, your conduct and threats satisfy me that you are thoroughly lost to all honor and I mean to treat you accordingly. Go, now! Leave Dead City without delay. If you are found here, in the morning, I will have you arrested and reveal this act of yours—which you know, will give you a lynch-court penalty."

"Oh! well, I'll go, then. I take great pleasure in bidding you a long farewell, Mr. Jester!"

She bowed low, and with a mocking laugh, turned and clambered out of the window, Jester covering her with his revolvers, until she had disappeared from view.

Going to the window, he peered out; all was dark and silent, and he could see nothing of her below.

The ladder, however, still leaned against the window ledge.

"I must throw it down!" he muttered, and seizing hold of it he did so, it falling upon the ground with a crash.

Almost simultaneously there was the sharp report of a revolver, and with a groan Jester sunk back into the room, and fell flat upon his back.

From an ugly hole in his temple blood spurted in a sickening stream.

He gave but a few moans—drew but a few gasping breaths, and then expired.

The shot had been a dead shot, indeed.

A short while afterward, Ferret Fan once more entered the room, with a face white and scared, and made a search for the coveted fortune, but a cry of rage escaped her when she failed to find it, and she hastily departed.

The pistol-shot had attracted no attention within the hotel! It was too common an occurrence in Dead City to be investigated.

CHAPTER XVI.

DICK AND CALAMITY MAKE UP

SCARCELY had Rex Ravel left Shasta Kate, lying in a state of insensibility, when the curtains parted, admitting Deadwood Dick upon the scene.

His face was stern and white, and he was plainly laboring under considerable excitement.

He knelt down beside the prostrate woman, and applied his ear to the region of her heart.

"Thank Heaven, she lives!" he said. "It is perhaps only a stunning blow, after all."

He raised her from the floor, and laid her on the couch he had occupied a couple of weeks previously. He then examined the wound.

There was a painful scalp abrasion and cuts, but so far as he could ascertain, there had been no fracture of the skull.

Searching about the room, he found both water and a bottle of liquor.

He at once proceeded to dress the wound as best he could. To do so, he was obliged to remove the mask from Shasta Kate's face, to discover that it was indeed his former wife, known far and wide as Calamity Jane.

She was changed, however, but, to Dick's eyes, it was a change for the better.

Her face was a trifle thinner, and its former expression of reckless vivacity was toned down by the impress of sadness and care, which gave to the clear-cut features a look of refinement that betrayed the long-suppressed nature of the woman-soul.

Tenderly and carefully Dick dressed the wound, and then set to work to restore her to consciousness, wondering how they should meet each other.

A few drops of liquor poured down her throat, caused a tremor to pass over her, and in a few moments she opened her eyes.

Deadwood Dick was standing beside her, holding one of her hands in his, and looking down at her.

She started at sight of him, and partly averted her face—trembled slightly, he fancied.

"Calamity dear!" he said, speaking in the old tender tone, "how do you feel?"

A sigh, as of relief, escaped her.

"Very weak!" she replied. "Am I hurt bad?"

"Not seriously, I think; merely a scalp wound, which I have dressed. It's a wonder, however, that the ruffian's blow did not kill you."

"Pity it didn't, more than a wonder," she replied. "Is he gone?"

"Yes; he fled, immediately after striking you. He has gone to Dead City after the fortune, no doubt."

"Likely. He will not get it, though. Was you behind the curtains before he struck me?"

"Yes, but the move was too quickly executed for me to prevent it."

"Where did he get the package which he supposed contained the money?"

"Jonathan Jester hid it in a crevice in the rocks. Ravel was spying on him, and obtained possession of the package after Jester had gone back to the hotel. I was spying on them both, and followed Ravel here. Did you know about this fortune case?"

"Not until I overheard your interview with Ferret Fan in the pocket."

"Ah! you were near, then?"

"In the very same thicket you had been hiding."

"Where is this boy of Ravel's?"

"In a place of safety. I have, since learning about the affair, put him where Rex Ravel will never see him again."

"How came you here with Ravel?"

"I met him in a card-room in Phoenix. I was broke, and he offered me fifty dollars a month to come here with him, and attend to the boy. I took a liking to the little fellow, and on his account, most of all, came."

Deadwood Dick took a turn up and down the room, his face indicating that he was in deep thought.

"Calamity!" he said, finally, without looking at her, "it was one of the greatest surprises of my life, when I found that you were still alive, for I believed I had buried you in the mountains, to the north of Faro Flats. However, the surprise was far from an unwelcome one. We both have passed through some strange experiences thus far in life, but have managed to come out O. K. What course in life do you propose to follow in the future?"

"I don't know as I can tell. I have no definite idea!" she said, in a voice that trembled with emotion. "My future life, in fact, is like an unwritten page. I only know one thing concerning it."

"May I ask what that is?"

"Certainly. It is no secret. I have become devotedly attached to little Rex, and mean to keep him. His father is no proper person to have charge of him, and I will take him and bring him up right."

"And right glad am I to hear you say so. The boy, whom I have never seen, undoubtedly needs a woman's motherly care, and I do not know of anything to prevent your having your desire fulfilled. Is he where he can be seen handy?"

"No! I have removed him from here, and temporarily placed him in charge of a miner's wife in Dead City."

"It is well so. Ravel will be back likely and want him."

"He'll not get him, and, more than that, he'd better keep out of my sight, or I'll put him out of the way of wanting anything!" Calamity said, the old spirited fire returning for a moment to her eyes.

"If Flora Harrison gets hold of him it's not likely you will get an opportunity to harm him," Dick

said. "Do you think Ravel stands any show of getting the fortune?"

"No!"

"Why not?"

"Oh! because, in the first place, Jonathan Jester hasn't got the fortune?"

"Ah! How do you make that out? Did he not bring it to Dead City?"

"Yes. But since this afternoon he has not had possession of it."

"I am still in the dark!"

"I will explain, then. During the afternoon I overheard an interview between Ferret Fan and Harold Haines, in which she announced her intention of obtaining possession of the fortune, claiming that it was more rightfully hers than any one else's. She induced Haines to join her, and it was their plan to make an open demand of Jonathan Jester for the money. If he refused to give it up, they were to visit his room in the dead of night and rob him of it."

"Ha! So that was the game, eh?"

"Yes. I knew enough about the matter to be strongly impressed with the idea that little Rex was the only rightful heir, and so I made it a point to anticipate them."

"Ah! then you—"

"Paid a quiet visit to Jester's room when he was asleep, removed the fortune from his sachel, and skipped out. First, however, I cut up some strips of paper into bank note size, and left them in place of the genuine, more as a joke than anything else. Jester, not suspecting that the package or his sachel had been tampered with, hid the package, and thus it fell into Ravel's possession."

"And you have the fortune?"

"Yes—that is, it is secreted in a place where I can get it when wanted."

"Calamity, you're a trump, as you always were! I am glad the fortune is secure and out of the reach of either Ravel or Ferret Fan. And now, Calamity, before I go, I want to ask you one question. Have you any desire to come back to me as my wife?"

"Do you want me back, Dick?"

"If you wish to come, I shall be glad to welcome you. Neither of us have been angels, in the past, but, let that drop. No one ever gets any consolation looking back into a shadowed past. The future may have much happiness in store for us."

"True. If you are willing to let bygones be bygones, I am."

"Then, it's a bargain, my little wife—my Queen Calamity!"

He took her to his breast, and kissed her with all the old-time fervor, and she nestled in his embrace, joyous and happy in the knowledge that his love was still hers.

Later, they consulted as to what was to be their next plan of action, and were thus engaged when footsteps were heard approaching.

An instant later, the curtains were parted, and grim-faced and resolute five of the One-Eyed Vultures fled into the room.

Their very coming seemed like an omen of evil, to reunited Dick and Calamity.

But, where was the sixth man?

CHAPTER XVII.

CONCLUSION.

THE occurrences of that eventful day and night in and about Dead City, have not all been told yet or else our tale would be finished.

Out in Dead City pocket, beneath the starry heavens, stood Rex Ravel, looking off toward the mining-camp, where a few lights were still to be seen.

"Jonathan Jester is asleep by this time," he muttered. "But, the question is, has he the money in his possession? Something tells me not—something tells me not. The package he secreted in the rocks, he evidently believed to be the money, the same as I did, when I afterward stole it. By heaven, I believe there's been some funny business going on. It looks very much to me as though some one had stolen the original package of money from Jester, without his suspecting it, and substituted the package of paper. Who would be likely to do it, except Flora Harrison, or Ferret Fan, as she calls herself?"

"Ferret Fan didn't do it, however!" replied a voice, and wheeling he beheld that very personage standing near at hand.

A revolver in her grasp, was held ready for instant use.

"Ha! you here?" Ravel gasped, feeling far from comfortable, for he presumed the girl bore him no good will.

"Yes, I'm here!" was the cool reply. "Ain't you glad to see me?"

"I don't know that I am particularly delighted!" he declared. "What are you doing out so late at night?"

"I'm on the same racket you are—fortune-hunting!" Fan answered. "From what I just overheard you say, you are not successful, I take it?"

"No. I thought I had it, pat, when I got hold of a package which Jonathan Jester hid in the rocks. But, the package turned out to be made up of paper."

"Ha! ha! That was clever."

"We shall see about it. Jester shall give me the money or I'll fix him!"

"Have you made any demand on him for it?"

"Not openly."

"Well, you'll not have a chance to, then!"

"Why not?"

"Because he's gone to join the angels!"

"What! dead?"

"As a herring."

"You are lying to me."

"Not a bit of it."

"When did he die?"

"Something like half an hour ago."

"You—"

"Killed him!" Fan added, viciously. "I'm on the kill to-night, and have marked you for the next martyr."

"Me? and Ravel looked alarmed, for she had the drop on him."

"I have a sister's death to avenge, you villain!"

"Nonsense. I had nothing to do with Lelia's death!"

"You lie. You shot her and stole the boy. Where is he?"

"In a safe place, never fear. So you expect to lay on to the fortune, do you?"

"Most assuredly. It is more mine than yours or the kid's!"

"Neither of us have got it, and there's no use of fighting over something we haven't got! We might better lay aside all other things and work together to the one end that of securing the money!"

"To share and share alike?"

"When we get it, yes. The money is what we both want, and to get it I am quite willing to give away one-half. Do you think Jester has got it?"

"No. I searched him and his effects thoroughly. He had but a few dollars!"

"Then, who has got it—Haines?"

"No. He's too pious to steal a straw. If any one has got it, it is Deadwood Dick!"

"Bah! That rascal is shut up where he can get no money!"

"I know you had him imprisoned, but he is again at liberty. He was released by your servant, Shasta Kate!"

A torrent of oaths burst from Rex Ravel's lips.

"Curses seize the woman!" he cried. "I never suspected her of such treachery as that. Are you positive that Deadwood Dick is at liberty?"

"I am. I had a talk with him, during the day just passed. It was from him that I learned of Lelia's murder, and that you had the boy!"

"Ha! than Deadwood Dick is on my track?"

"Yes; he wants you, and the boy, too."

"Curse him. It may be he who has got possession of the fortune?"

"I am pretty well satisfied, on that score. He of all persons I know of now. I would suspect, for he promised Lelia to secure the fortune and the boy, both."

"Then, we must find the cuss!"

"You are right. But, we can't go too careful about it. He's a bad customer to deal with."

"So I am aware. But, once we get a glimpse of him, we've only one thing to do, shoot him down at sight!"

"I'm agreeable to that. I've a grudge against Deadwood Dick, and have sworn to take his life!"

"Oh! ye hev, hev ye? Waal now, I wonder ef ye hev?"

It was not Rex Ravel who uttered the words—in fact, they were not uttered aloud, at all, but were the musing of a man, who was crouching near by, in the shadow of a rock—none other than the bibulous and happy-go-lucky tramp, Bug-juice Bob.

The appearance of the Vultures was startling alike to Deadwood Dick and Calamity Jane, and both stepped back a pace and drew their revolvers.

"What do you want here?" Dick demanded sternly, resolved to fight for dear life, if their visit should prove to be a hostile one.

"You can put up your weapons!" one of the five said. "We ain't here as enemies, by a long shot. True, we've bin servin' Choker, but we've never got a cent fer it, an' we hear he counts on skinnin' out an' leavin' us in the lurch!"

"Ah! that's it, eh?"

"Exactly. We didn't hire out to him to come hyer an' do no dirty work; but he offered us big money to keep Dead City shut o' strangers, an' that's how we cum ter nab you an' t'other feller. D'ye know what the colonel did a bit ago?"

"I haven't the slightest idea."

"Waal, he knifed our sixth pard, Jim Folger. Jim war down in the passage, an', somehow, got in the way, an' the colonel swore at him, an' stuck a knife thru' him!"

"Indeed!"

"You bet that's jest what he did, an' poor Jim is a corpus. But, captin', we ain't ther boys ter stand that, nary time. We all on ussez 'Rah fer revenge!' an' you can bet we're goin' ter do ther thing up brown. When ther sun luks down inter Dead City pocket, Choker will be hangin' ter ther limb uv a tree!"

"You intend to lynch him?"

"You bet yer buttons that's what we intend! Ther ornery mean cuss did ther act ter our pard, an' we're goin' ter make him dance fer it!"

"Well, I don't know as I blame you. The rascal deserves hanging, for the murder of his wronged wife!"

"On course he does, and sence we've found out who you be, we kinder take ter ye. An' that's why we are here now. We want yer ter lend us a hand—that is ter say, act as our captin', until we've did the job up brown."

"Thanks for the offer, but really, you will have to excuse me, I have one here who needs all my attention for the present!" Dick said, nodding to Calamity.

"All right. We won't urge you. We thought mebbe you'd like ter take a hand. D'ye propose ter leave here?"

"Yes."

"Then we want yer ter promise not ter give away the secret o' ther mine ter them miners o' Dead City."

"Very well. You can depend on it that I'll say nothing about such a place existing."

"Thankee, sir. Ye'r a gentleman, an' you 'n'

yer gal is welcome ter stay here as long as you please, or come an' go when ye please. We're off now—fer vengeance!"

And the avengers stalked from the apartment.

When they were gone, Dick said:

"If you are not afraid to remain here alone, Calamity, I ought to go into the pocket to look after my pard, Bug-juice Bob. I fear he has got into trouble, and may be in need of help."

"Go ahead!" Calamity said. "I am feeling all right, except that I have a headache, and I can look out for myself, well enough."

"If Ravel should return here—"

"No fear of that. There is but one entrance to the caverns, and the Vultures will take care not to let him get past that."

Deadwood Dick looked to his revolvers, to see that they were in working order, and kissing Calamity, took his departure, and was soon out in the pocket, under the stars.

At the entrance to the mine, one of the Vultures was stationed, but he made no comment, as Dick passed out.

Dead City was now dark and silent, and it was evident that its population had all retired to rest.

After deliberating, a few minutes, Dick took his course toward the thicker that had formerly served him as a hiding-place, concluding that, if Bug-juice Bob was not dead drunk up in the camp, he would be there.

When he arrived near the spot, he heard Bob's voice.

"I tell yer, pards, ye've made a mistake. I'm no Rex Ravel ner no Cunnel Choker. Bug-juice Bob aire my handle!"

"Git out! That won't work!" the voice of one of the Vultures cried. "Ye'r Choker, an' ye'r our meat. Ye killed our pard, an' yer's got ter swing fer et. At him, boys. Git ther noose ready!"

And then there was a rush of feet.

"Heavens! They've mistaken Bug-juice for Ravel!" Dick cried.

He dashed forward and in upon the scene, just as the Vultures were in the act of shirring the noose around Bob's gullet.

A glance showed Dick why the avengers had made the mistake. Although dressed as formerly, Bug-juice had embellished his appearance, by the addition of the false beard, which he had snatched from Rex Ravel's face, at the Big Nugget Hotel.

"Hold on! Let up there, for you've got the wrong man!" Dick cried. "This fellow is Bug-juice Bob, my pard!"

The avengers, at first, were loth to believe it, until Bug-juice removed the whiskers, and explained how he came by them!

"You came just in the nick of time, sir," said Graham, one of the five, addressing Deadwood Dick, "for your pard would have been in Kingdom Come, by this time. Well, boys, if we haven't scared the game away, we'll continue the search."

"An' ef ther's to be a neck-tie party, this eve!" Bug-juice declared, grimly. "I'm goin' erlong, ter see the fun. Ef thar's one thing I enjoy, more than another, et's ther sublime sight o' seein' a feller hangin' by his neck, in mid-air, w' his legs kickin' out in more directions than do blow ther twenty-seven orthodox winds of the earth!"

As the Vultures made no objection, the party moved off—all except Deadwood Dick.

He stood and gazed after them until the darkness hid them from view.

"I reckon I might as well return to Calamity, and make preparations to leave these parts at once," he muttered. "There's scarcely a doubt but what the avengers will accomplish their purpose, and then little Rex will have no one to look after his welfare but Calamity and I—for Ferret Fan has proven herself to be no proper person to have control of him. And, if I am not mistaken, the custody of the boy will serve to tempt Calamity to the charms of home life, and subdue her wild, roving spirit."

He turned and walked toward the entrance to the caverns, but had gone only a few steps when a blow on the head felled him to the earth unconscious.

But unconscious only for a moment, for he heard a voice say:

"Maybe the blow killed him!"

It was the voice of Ferret Fan.

He knew it, and did not open his eyes.

"Bah! I did not hit him hard enough to kill him!" another voice said—that of Rex Ravel, much to Dick's surprise. "He'll come to, give him time enough. We don't want him dead yet; he must tell where the money is!"

"And if he refuses?"

"Then I'll blow his accursed brains out!"

"Which wouldn't be policy. Deadwood Dick dead, we never would get any trace of the money."

Ravel made no response; he seemed in meditation.

"I have been thinking!" the villain finally said, "and have come to a conclusion. Shasta Kate and this Deadwood Dick are evidently acquainted, or else Shasta would not have released him. If Deadwood Dick can't give us what we want to know, we will kill him, and rely on Shasta Kate for the information. That is final!"

"Lead ahead, then. If I do not get half of the fortune, you know I have a sister's death to avenge!" Ferret Fan warned.

Deadwood Dick opened his eyes—the same brilliant eyes which so often had served him in the past.

"Ha! he is awake!" Ravel uttered.

"I am!" Dick replied. "I have been awake for some time. From what you have said, I take it that you believe I have the Harrison fortune?"

"We do, without the least doubt!"

"Then you are wrong. I only know that Jonathan Jester no longer has the money, and that another person has it. More I cannot tell you."

"You are sure it is all?" Rex Ravel demanded, fiercely.

"You might put me in a hydraulic press, and you couldn't possibly squeeze any more information out of me!"

Ravel laughed viciously.

"Well, if we don't get the desired information out of you," he said, drawing and cocking his revolver, "we will at least have the satisfaction of witnessing your death-struggles. Flora, have you a watch?"

"I have!"

"What time is it?"

"Twenty minutes after one!"

"All right!" Ravel said, pulling the hammer of his revolver back to full cock. "When it is twenty-five after, you are to cough—then git, as per pre-arrangement!"

"That is not necessary!" a stern voice called, from out in the darkness. "Down with that revolver, Choker, or you're riddled!"

Ravel's face turned white. He knew the voice, and the revolver fell from his hand.

Seeing that the game was up, Ferret Fan turned, and made a dash for liberty; but, quick as she was, the power of a revolver was quicker, and uttering a scream of agony, she fell to the ground.

So far as the fortune was concerned, she was counted out.

The Vultures rushed forward with a howl of vengeance.

They seized Ravel, put the noose about his neck, and—

But let's draw the curtain, over a picture by no means pleasant even to narrate.

Poor Jester's body was, by Deadwood Dick, sent back to Sacramento, and properly buried.

The Vultures remained at the secret mine, for a time, and then abandoned it; and about the same time, Dead City changed its name, and lost its identity with the strange events we have recorded.

Harold Haines, be it said to his credit, stuck to his good purposes, and is now a prominent and honorable citizen of Leadville, Colorado.

And, at last accounts, Bug-juice Bob, (of course under another name) was doing his challenge bottle act, in a Western Variety Theater.

As for Deadwood Dick, Calamity Jane and Little Rex, we shall hear from them again.

THE END.

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